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# THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

THE ELEMENTS OF THE ART, THEIR EVOLUTION  
AND PRESENT USE

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This book is inscribed in lively gratitude to the three scholars  
to whose influence it is largely due,

to

**William Dean Howells**

the friend, whose thoughtful converse first turned the writer's critical  
attention to the theme, when both were younger,

to

**Professor Francis Hobey Stoddard**

of New York University, the teacher, under whose capable guidance  
the writer had once the good fortune to pursue some portions  
of the general subject in post-graduate research,

and to

**Professor Lewis Freeman Mott**

of the College of the City of New York, the colleague, whose kindly  
urgency is in some measure responsible for the fact  
that the product of years of interested  
study is here presented  
to the public.

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## INTRODUCTION

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The aim of this book is to make clear the principles that underlie the most popular form of literature, the novel. With this end in view these pages trace historically and by the aid of constant illustration the development of the art of novel writing. Considering the present frequently lamented "tyranny of the novel," it is surprising that the technique of this influential form of art has not been more closely studied. Its principles are often loosely discussed, and histories of the novel or critiques on the work of individuals are abundant; but nowhere has the complete body of accepted law been gathered and formulated for common use.

The necessity for some such undertaking is obvious if the critical study of fiction is to advance scientifically. Hence I have endeavored here to analyze the novel, to separate its parts, and then, going back to the earliest fiction, to see how each one of these essential elements has been employed and understood through all the ages. Thus the book, without being history, has something of history's cultural value in its chronological advance.

One important field which I have kept in view is that of collegiate study. Within the last twenty years most of our colleges and universities have begun to give the novel serious consideration. The teaching of literature no longer means solely the discussing of poetry and of the essay. The novel is acknowledged as a potent literary form. Yet we have no completed text-book with which to approach it. Histories, whether of the novelists or their works, can not meet the demand; it is not through

## INTRODUCTION

histories that we study other branches of literature. For the analysis of the novel, the discussion of its elements, and the tracing of their historical development, I venture to offer this book, the outlines of which have been tested in practical classroom work.

So far as the general reader is concerned, it may be assumed that he must often desire to establish his opinions of his favorite novelists on some firmer basis than that of mere instinctive admiration, the changing whims of personal enjoyment. The need and value of a known foundation, not only for the judgment but even more for the execution of literary work, comes specially home to one who has faced the subject from many sides, has toiled as an editor, encouraged as a teacher, and groaned as a professional "reader" of manuscripts.

The vast mass of beginners in the art of novel writing are not as a class characterized by any marked appreciation of the value of the form which they essay, or even any practical understanding of the technical difficulties of their work. They are poets pouring out their souls in blind confusion, or copyists laboriously imitating the imperfections of their favorite author. To my brethren of the critic world this book is therefore offered in confidence that its need at least will be recognized, though its conclusions may be open to dispute. It is intended both to guide the experiments of the beginner and to arouse the criticism of the expert. Every discussion of the subject, even though acrimonious, must tend toward what is after all the main object of the book, the recognition and establishment of the true principles of the novel's art.

NEW YORK, April, 1908.

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PART I  
THE ORIGIN OF THE NOVEL





## CHAPTER I

### THE BEGINNINGS OF STORY BUILDING

**The Aim  
of the  
Book**

To speak of the Technique of the Novel suggests almost a contradiction of terms.

The shapes which fiction may assume are so many and so interchangeable, that its art must often appear to have no permanent structural principles. Yet while no one may ever hope, or presumably desire, to announce an inevitable mathematical formula for the production of novels by wholesale, either good or bad; still there are certain general laws to which the novel is amenable. Almost any recent discussion of either a novelist or his work will refer casually to some among these laws as being universally accepted, though neither the cause nor the authority for their establishment is explained. Usually, indeed, the law seems deduced for the occasion. The wide-read critic, glancing round, sees that a certain practice has long been customary, he sees a reason for this, and he states a law. Nowhere do we find any book in which this underlying technique is laid down for us, complete.

It is to supply this gap in the contemporary study of fiction that the present work is offered. It attempts first to establish what the essential elements of the novel are, then to trace their employment and development through early fiction until by their union in a single work they formed the modern novel, and after that to follow each

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of them historically through their more recent usage, so as to understand their variations and value in the present day. The book may at least obviate the necessity which hitherto has been forced upon so many of us, of digging for ourselves over this same old ground, where each searcher patiently unearths the old, old facts, and each in his turn is tempted to celebrate the reappearance of the familiar fossils as his own great new discovery.

There is a popular idea that anybody, no matter how unlettered, can write a novel, the only prerequisite beyond paper and pencil being some very slight skill in penmanship. Yet the most superficial reflection will convince us that these possessions, essential though they be, are not wholly adequate. Imagine them as belonging to a savage unacquainted with all literature; and bid him write. Even, conceding a point, give the bewildered aborigine a theme; ask him for an account of some particular experience of his own. What will you get beyond a few rambling, disconnected recollections? Could the savage by any remotest chance produce a novel?

We are all of us unconsciously attending a literary school. The tales of to-day are written by readers of the earlier tales. Each reader has, more or less deliberately, become conscious of the outlines which gave him pleasure. He has thus imbibed some of the underlying principles of the art of story building.

Unfortunately these principles are vague, and smothered from hasty view in the mass of words. Hence their existence is overlooked; and hence follows failure. It is

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an understatement to say that of the hundreds of MS. novels submitted by hopeful amateurs to our great publishing houses, more than one half are rejected immediately and perforce by the professional "reader" as impossible, because they ignore these basic principles of the novel-writing art. The admitted vagueness of this technique gives only the more reason why the aspiring young author, as also the less ambitious reader, should be enabled to familiarize himself readily with what does exist.

The difficulty has in no way been removed by the rough and ready attempt of some writers to substitute the laws

**Confusion of the Novel with the Drama** of one art for those of another. The novel and the drama are somewhat closely allied. So also are the novel and the epic poem. But they are not the

same. When over a score of years ago Freytag offered to the world his most interesting study of the technique of the drama, he was able to reduce that narrow form to a pencilled diagram, a sort of capital A. Recent successful dramas have, however, deviated widely from the details of his scheme; and perhaps the underlying truth which justified its general application was no more than Aristotle had pointed out, the world-old law of life that every action has antecedents which lead up to it, and consequents which flow away. Or, to phrase the idea in yet broader form, each moment has behind it the infinite past and beyond it the infinite future. In this sense, of two infinite lines meeting at one sharp point, Freytag's diagram might apply to every act and every story since the world began, and only in this broad view can it be imposed upon the novel. There have been notable tales which can be

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so analyzed and interpreted that every detail of the A applies as though they had been diagrammed from it; and there have been yet greater tales which ignored it wholly.

So too with the epic. Some of our earlier writers, as Fielding, and some of our critics also, have sought to fit the novel to the epic's frame. The result in Fielding's case was intentionally a farcical epic; but it was also a farcical novel. The author deliberately sets his hero wandering through a world of nonsense, and at the end dismisses the impossible puppet with an unearned rank and fortune hurled at him suddenly in burlesque. This lack of sequence is typical of the epic, which presents a national hero or a theme of national interest, where the climax and close are already familiar, and where the reader's patriotism leads him to look eagerly at each isolated fact. The novel, on the other hand, presents unknown figures travelling an unknown road, and for each of these it must arouse some individual interest. In short, while a novel may conceivably conform itself to the epic's laws, just as it may to the drama's, it can only do so in a secondary way and after first conforming to its own very different technique.

How then shall the investigator discover these hidden yet insistent laws; or, finding them, how shall we all reach any degree of accord as to their value? The only convincing, as the only truly scientific, way seems to be by tracing fiction from its beginnings. In the present work, therefore, I seek to view the technique of

**Need of  
Historical  
Examination**



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the novel not only as it stands established in this twentieth century, but as its principles appeared in earlier times, as they were first conceived and misconceived in the dim dawning of the art. I seek in these opening chapters to rediscover the early and half obliterated steps by which the formless fiction of a remote antiquity acquired, one by one, certain general ideas of art, developed for itself a fairly definite structure, and thus rose out of chaos to become the modern novel.

The search for these beginnings involves the examination of a wide field. The name "novel," writers incline to-day to confine to one especial form of tale. But just what that form is, just what qualities are to be demanded and what bounds prescribed, is by no means sharply defined. Moreover, though the limits were as exactly agreed upon as those of a sonnet or a canzonet, the distinction would still be only an arbitrary one. The novel is not an invention, it is a growth; not a carefully outlined machine, but a widely branching tree; for which no gardener's shears have yet been found with power to clip and trim, and reduce it to live by artificial rule. It is but one of the many forms into which fiction has developed, through which it is still developing. Our modern novel is the offspring of many and broadly differing ancestors; and from each of its scattered lines of descent it has inherited certain of its present characteristic features. "In its genesis," says Professor Cross, "the novel is as old as either the epic or the drama."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Vide "New International Encyclopædia," edition of 1904, Vol. XIV, p. 660.

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Despite the vague and widely scattered material with which any examination of the beginnings of fiction has thus to deal, one can trace even in the earliest tales a real development, a slow progress toward higher art and completer form, which lends to the search much analytic interest.

### **The Origin of Fiction**

Fiction in its widest sense may be defined as the intentional separation of the expression from the fact. As such it is older than man, older than his boasted Simian ancestry. "Old as the world itself," says one author with a pardonable exuberance of fancy; for truly the question of the origin becomes matter for the imagination of the poet, rather than the sober scrutiny of the historian. Yet even under such vagrant guidance as Fancy offers, some consideration of beginnings may prove helpful toward the understanding of the later development of the story teller's art.

Fiction in its simplest form, that is, falsehood plain and unadorned, must have far antedated human intellect. The lie has ever been the child of mere vulpine cunning. The cat, when she strolls with that lazy, somewhat bored air away from the half dead mouse only to turn and pounce on it as it crawls brokenly toward its hole, is a fictionist skilled to the finest detail. The fox, when he trots back over his own trail, then leaps aside into the brush, tells such a complete and artistic lie as baffles both dog and man.

Yet one can see that some beginning, crude and stumbling, there must have been. Our protoplasmic ancestors did not lie. The starfish does not; none of the radiata

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do. Even the articulata are gentlemen of their word, and may be relied on to the last grasp. In what far geological epoch life first reached the lie, becomes therefore as elusive and shadowy a question as that other, far more solemn one: At what high period of its course will life sweep beyond the lie and enter on the simple security of truth again?—a culmination which, as we trace the upward course through all the history of fiction, we begin to feel is not wholly beyond conception.

It is perhaps not going too far to say that it was because of man's successful employment of the lie, because he excelled in it, that he first rose from the brutes, first mastered them. At the beginning he held in falsehood but a poorly developed treasure; he used it only for attack and defence, for trap and sudden dart and secret hiding-place; he lived by it.

Falsehood first became an art, the "art of fiction," when, quickly following on Self-consciousness, our human Vanity was born. The wild ape-man who thought, "How strong am I!" thought soon, we may be sure, to let his neighbor see his strength. When the development of language permitted, he boasted of his deeds. Here was the first tale! So long as the narrator kept wholly to the facts, it was history. So soon as he conceived the notion of going beyond them, it was fiction. It was conscious art.

At first this art would have dealt only in exaggerations. The narrator would have drawn all his figures of heroic size. Then came slow realization that the word might be wholly dissociated from the fact, that adventures could be much better told if one sat quietly at home and thought

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them out. That artist who first conceived this comfortable improvement upon fiction, was a genius, as great for his time as our greatest. His efforts need not necessarily have lingered on his own achievements. The earnest thinker escapes some of the smaller vanities. More probably the originator was a poet, dreaming of the powers which lay behind wind and wave. With him a new Force came into the world: IMAGINATION was born.<sup>1</sup>

The next advances were obvious. If one man could invent a tale, so could another; and each must make his heroes overmatch the last. The soaring talent, in its poetic exaltation of mundane fact or its simple joy of self-laudation, had not then to encounter carping critics. There were no all-wise cyclopædias, no known laws of nature even, to guide and curb it. Adventurous tales must soon have overleaped those boundaries of possibility of whose existence even the authors were unaware. To lions, succeeded dragons; to foes, giants; to great men, gods; to cunning ones, magicians. It is at this point, when fiction was still speaking in the voice of history, but with such excessive grimace that the shrewder listeners must have known her clearly for another than her twin sister, it is at this point that our antiquarians have stumbled in Egypt on the earliest surviving record of the art.

Here then the seeker must discard the swift wings of fancy and constrain himself to plod onward with the

<sup>1</sup>Perhaps the earliest myths, the primeval folk-lore tales were of this conscious fiction, poet-born. Personally, however, I incline to think them products of the earlier stage, scarcely even conscious exaggerations, but metaphorical expressions of a soon-forgotten fact.

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slower, surer step of science. This "oldest story in the world" surely deserves careful investigation. Moreover before delving into it one must reach some general basis of understanding as to the essential elements of the novel, The miner must be prepared to recognize each rough hewn jewel.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ELEMENTS OF THE NOVEL

**Differing Views as to the Novel's Essentials**    What is a novel? If one appeals to the published authorities for the guidance of definitions, he finds himself confronted by wide divergences of view, or at least of practice. The fact that the novel has been a growth, perhaps sufficiently explains why each new work upon its history begins in a different place and with a different tale.

The renown of being "the first novel," or "the first modern novel," a customary discrimination which has no value except that of insisting on increasing exactitude of technique, has been ascribed to a dozen widely separated works. Many of our histories of literature still confer the honor upon Richardson's "Pamela" (1740). Others attribute it to Defoe's narratives (1719). Frenchmen dispute the claim of "Pamela" in favor of the works of Prévost or Marivaux (circa 1730), or even of Madame Lafayette's "Princess of Cleves," half a century earlier. M. Jusserand devotes an entire interesting book to "The Novel in the Time of Shakespeare"; and Professor Warren writes a "History of the Novel *Previous* to the Eighteenth Century," in which he selects as the first novel "Amadis of Gaul" (circa 1470). This difference of expression evidently indicates that each of these critics has established for himself a slightly differing definition of

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the novel, so that one is willing to include under the name what another regards as lacking some essential element.

The derivation of the name itself is of little value in deciding upon its present meaning; because the two have only an accidental association. Both Richardson and his celebrated successor Fielding preferred to call their works "histories," while "novella" was in their day an Italian expression for a little tale. Indeed, well into the nineteenth century, the dictionaries persisted in following this Italian meaning in their definition of the word novel.

Turning next to the critics for assistance, one is met by the difficulty that, so far as the matter can be traced, earlier ages were content to enjoy their stories without analyzing them. The Abbé Huet's "Origine des Romans," published in 1678 in discussion of Mme.

### Early Attempts at Defining the Novel

Lafayette's stories, is the earliest extant work which attempts to take the novel seriously. Mainly, however, in this and its accompanying "Observations et Jugemens sur les Principaux Romans Français," the Abbé has only unstinted praise for all he reads, and so his opinions are of little permanent value, except as showing how easily a pleasant gentleman can be satisfied.

He establishes a definition, in which the word romance is of course used, as it is still used in France, as being nearly synonymous with the English term novel: "What are properly called romances are fictions of love adventures, written in prose with art, for the pleasure and instruction of readers."<sup>1</sup> This, the earliest definition

<sup>1</sup>The passage opens the second paragraph of the original edition, "De l'Origine des Romans," Paris, 1678. "Ce que l'on appelle proprement Romans sont des fictions d'aventures amoureuses, écrites en prose avec art, pour le plaisir et l'instruction des lecteurs."

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which at all approaches an examination of the modern novel, will deserve remembrance in our later search, chiefly for what it leaves out. The Abbé discusses his definition exhaustively, without any reference whatever to plot. The idea of unity was apparently wholly foreign to his conception of the subject.

Dr. Johnson, whose dictionary did so much to settle the English meanings of terms, had read both Richardson and Fielding; yet he was content to define a novel as "a smooth tale, generally of love." The phrase has been often quoted in ridicule against him, especially in connection with "Rasselas," his own loveless effort of the kind; but it must be remembered that Johnson probably had in mind the Italian novella as well as the English tale, and sought to include both in a general summary. The definition seems at least worth while as a personal confession. What the good doctor looked for in his own novel reading must have been a stirring of tender emotions, united to a pleasant style.

Clara Reeve in her "Progress of Romance" (1785) seems the earliest professional critic to attempt any serious analysis of the newly risen literary form. She offers a definition: "The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written."<sup>1</sup> This sentence, however, had not for its primary purpose the explaining of the novel itself, but rather the separation of the more recent species from the older and broader world of romance, from which it was developing and had become differentiated. Any book, whether history,

<sup>1</sup>Vide dialogue "Progress of Romance," original edition, Colchester, 1785.



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poetry, or geography, unless like the mediæval romances it deliberately aims to speak of other ages and super-human folk, will be a picture of some part of the life and manners of the times in which it is written. Moreover we can not to-day accept a definition which by insisting on a contemporary record excludes the historical novel. Let us pick, therefore, only one suggestive point from this third definition—the novel antagonized the old romances; it sought an effect of reality.

Fielding, the great conscious artist who first examined the technique of the new art, discusses his own experiments most interestingly. He says in "Tom Jones," "As I am in reality the founder of a new province of writing, so I am at liberty to make what laws I please therein."<sup>1</sup> He insists mainly on three points. First, his work must be interesting and not too intense; it is to be "serio-comic," "mock heroic." Second, it is to show real life; he is never done jeering at the old romances, and he discusses at some length just how improbable an event he may be allowed to introduce. Third, the story must aim to teach people the folly as well as the wickedness of all dishonesty. Here, then, we have Mrs. Reeve's demand for verisimilitude reasserted, and closely allied with it the older idea of Huet that this picture of life must try to teach a lesson—perhaps it were better to say, teaches without trying, even as real life does.

In the preface to "Joseph Andrews," his earlier work, Fielding speaks of the novel as a "comic epic" in prose. Epics, he tells us, are enlarged tragedies, and this new

<sup>1</sup>Vide "History of Tom Jones," Book II, Chap. I, also the first chapters of Books IV and VIII.

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

form of his an enlarged comedy.<sup>1</sup> This comparison seems to imply that the novel is to have plot, unity, action, exciting situations, and in short all the main elements of the comic drama. Let us take the following then as being roughly what Fielding never attempts to put into condensed form, his definition of the novel. It is an enlarged comedy, true to common life and morally instructive, built for the library, not the stage.

Such, however, was not the general comprehension of a novel in Fielding's day. The very ablest of his followers could not rise to such exactitude of form. To quote Professor Cross in his estimate of Smollett, "If a fable may drift along at the pleasure of an author, with the episode thrust in at will, then anybody can write a novel. . . . The novel thus put into the hands of the mob, ceased to be a serious literary product."<sup>2</sup> This is but the voicing of a common criticism, which asserts that the later novelists of the eighteenth century failed to grasp the true meaning and value of the technique of Richardson and Fielding.

One must look, therefore, among modern writers for the first clear and commonly accepted analysis of the principles underlying the novel; though our critics have naturally avoided exact definitions or limitations with so free a form. The insistence on close following of plot becomes steadily more emphatic. In 1882, Mr. Tuckerman in his "History of English Prose Fiction"<sup>3</sup> said, "It is to this

**Recent  
Definitions**

<sup>1</sup>Vide "Joseph Andrews," preface, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Vide "The Development of the English Novel," 1899, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup>Vide "History of English Prose Fiction," p. 208.

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✓excellence of plot—the subordination of each minor circumstance to the general aim, the skill with which all events are made to lead up to the final dénouement—that Fielding if any one deserves the title of the founder of the English novel.” As a criticism of Fielding this might excite argument, since the great originator himself, obsessed by his epic idea, urged the necessity of the “episode”: that is, the detached incident or even wholly unconnected story told by a character within the tale, for the purpose of affording variety. But Mr. Tuckerman’s words are very valuable as emphasizing how important to modern eyes has grown the close holding to the thread of the story’s plot. Perhaps Fielding builded better than he knew. ✓

Jusserand in his “English Novel of the Time of Shakespeare” has the same thought in view. He asserts that Thomas Nash first pointed out the “road that was to lead to the true novel,” in that he was the first “to endeavor to relate in prose a long, sustained story, having for its chief concern: the truth.”<sup>1</sup> These words are perhaps a trifle vague; but “sustained story” presumably means plot, and it is of course truth of resemblance to life, not actual truth of incident, that is put forward as the most important point.

Professor Warren in his “History of the Novel” (1895) attempts a closer handling of the matter, is the first, in fact, to supply us with a measured definition: “A novel is a fictitious prose narrative which contains a plot.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Vide “English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare,” 1890, p. 347.

<sup>2</sup>Vide “History of the Novel Previous to the Eighteenth Century,” 1895, p. 11.

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Thus there has been gradually established an increasing and now insistent demand for (verisimilitude) and for plot.

### The Essential Qualities Selected

Looking a step further, one finds other elements also numbered as essentials. Professor Bliss Perry, speaking of the near connection of poet and novelist, gives several suggestions which approach a definition: "Novelist and poet alike are primarily interested in human life. They describe it as it seems to have manifested itself in the irrevocable past, as it exists to-day, and as it may be found in the imaginary, unknown world of the future. They are interested in all that surrounds human life and affects its myriad operations. The external world, as it is portrayed by the novelists and poets, is chiefly a setting and framework for the more complete *exhibition of human characteristics*.<sup>1</sup> The incidents which they narrate have for their aim the *portrayal of character in this or that emergency and evil of actual circumstance*, or else they are as it were the mechanism—the gymnastic apparatus—by which *life might test and measure itself* if it pleased. Both novelist and poet, in a word, care first of all for persons."<sup>2</sup>

That American genius, too soon lost from among us, Sidney Lanier, after pointing out that the novelist affects to reveal the inmost hearts of his characters, to pass judgment on their motives, says, "This consideration seems to me to lift the novel to the *very highest and holiest plane of creative effort*; he who takes up the pen of the novelist

<sup>1</sup>The italics here and in the following passages are employed only by the present writer.

<sup>2</sup>Vide "A Study of Prose Fiction," 1902, p. 32.

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assumes as to that novel to take up along with it the *omniscience of God*.”<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, let me recall the advice of Stevenson, that other genius untimely dead. In his “Humble Remonstrance” he bids the story teller “choose a motive, whether of *character* or of *passion*; carefully construct his *plot* so that every incident is an illustration of the motive, and every property employed shall bear to it a near relation of congruity or contrast; avoid a sub-plot, unless, as sometimes in Shakespeare, the sub-plot be a reversion or complement of the main intrigue; . . . and allow neither himself in the narrative, nor any character in the course of the dialogue, to utter one sentence *that is not part and parcel of the business of the story* or the discussion of the problem involved. . . . And as the root of the whole matter, let him bear in mind that his novel is not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude, but a *simplification* of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity.”<sup>2</sup>

In face of such exalted views as these the novel must begin to seem a somewhat high and difficult form. One can scarce be content to dismiss it simply as a “sustained story.” Or if we conclude to accept it as “a fictitious prose narrative which contains a plot,” then the words fictitious and prose are merely limitations, and the only explanatory words giving the content of the idea are narrative and plot, which latter must be expanded to mean many things.

Especially noteworthy is the fact that each of the stand-

<sup>1</sup>Vide “The English Novel,” revised edition of 1900, p. 270.

<sup>2</sup>Vide “Memories and Portraits,” Collier ed., Vol. XII, p. 187.

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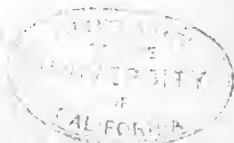
ard authors just quoted dwells upon a different point. Perry insists on the portrayal of character, on the verisimilitude by which life may measure itself. Hence naturally enough he declares himself an admirer of the novels of William Dean Howells. Lanier speaks of the solemnity of the author's position, the deep religious spirit which should animate him; and then Lanier offers George Eliot as the typical great novelist. Stevenson insists on motive and plot, on the close connection and intimate relation which every word must have to the "business of the story." He has illustrated this in his own brilliant tales.

Stevenson also mentions passion, and other critics direct our attention still more to the importance of presenting characters under stress of this emotional excitement. Professor Stoddard in his "Study of the Novel" suggests that "One may even . . . say that a novel is a story of *the progress of some passion*,<sup>1</sup> and its effect upon a life."

Thus we have already for the novel four more or less essential elements: (1) the plot, the story, the connected "action," recognized as of primary importance by every one from Fielding to Stevenson, though with widely differing views as to its requirements; (2) verisimilitude, convincingness, truth not to some actually existing occurrence but to the law of life which lies behind; this might perhaps be identified with the earnestness, the high seriousness, insisted on by Lanier; (3) character portrayal, which exists of course in many stages of development, sometimes as a mere childish recognition that men

<sup>1</sup>Vide "A Study of the Novel," 1901, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Later on we shall come to a single school which, while admitting the necessity of plot, treats it as a minor matter.



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are different, then as an attempt to portray the outward difference, next as a study of the inward causes of difference, and finally as an analysis of character growth under the stress of life, which may be more or less connected with the next element; (4) emotional excitement or passion.

Turning now to the novel writers themselves, one finds many of them giving emphasis to yet other points. Thus, Ebers' works are really pictures of Egyptian manners and customs; his "background," his stage setting, becomes more important than the story told upon it. Marie Corelli paints dream pictures in words of music; it is her "style" that fascinates her admirers. Mrs. Ward under guise of a novel presents and demands consideration for some solemn and perplexing problem of human life. Anna Katharine Green challenges our wits to solve a riddle. Her technical art seems concerned not with plot in its ordinary sense, but with that further development of plot known as intrigue, the concealment of the true plot or sequence of events, the presenting it in inverted order and playing hide-and-seek with the reader's ingenuity.

The novel, then, may concern itself further with (5) background; (6) style; (7) purpose, that is, the book may have a distinct purpose of its own, to urge this or that reform, as distinguished from Fielding's and Lanier's earlier idea of the necessity of high general purpose or nobility on the author's part; and (8) intrigue. Of these the eighth may perhaps be dismissed as a mere subdivision of plot or story. For the present discussion the seventh, the purpose of the author, whether it be just to

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to speak out the soul that is in him, or to propose a problem, or to teach a lesson, or merely to make a book which shall amaze and amuse us, and put money in his own purse—this purpose may most readily be considered in combination with the second suggested element, verisimilitude. That is to say, the desire to express truth is only one among the various purposes which a writer may have. That it should be the chief purpose of the novel, perhaps the only one, we have just seen asserted by both critics and novelists. Early fiction, however, did not show itself specially eager for verisimilitude. Other desires swayed the story teller far more strongly. Hence I have preferred, temporarily at least, to group the aim of showing truth with the many other possible aims of fiction, and to give the second element of the novel the wider general name of "motive." Some impelling motive it is obvious a writer must have; and the nature of this will control the nature of his book. To what extent the desire to express truth must dominate all other aims in the novel, is a question for later consideration.

There are other elements in contemporary story writing which might also demand attention. Such for instance is humor. But charming as humor is, it is not an *essential* element. Novels and extremely valuable ones have been written without it. Moreover its use in fiction does not differ from its use elsewhere. It is for this present view an extrinsic thing, an ornament.

The six points thus left remaining represent each of them a distinct department with which the modern novel does and must concern itself. (That is, give a man a motive—or more specifically a desire to express truth—



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strong enough to set him writing out his thoughts; give him words, a style wherewith to clothe the thought; characters, people to figure out the thought to others; emotion, some inward excitement to stir the characters above mere eating and sleeping; plot, a connected series of actions springing from the emotion; and lastly a background of common life or scenery against which all may stand; combine these and you have a novel.) Exclude any one of them and you have not. Which element could be left out? Background, the detail? The result would be a mere scenario, a list of events, a series of notes, waiting to be expanded. Emotion, passion, the root of every energetic act in life? The result would be an unintelligible monstrosity, ghosts moving without cause, automata prosing one knew not what nor why.

Indeed these six elements, instead of being gathered from the discussions of previous writers, might have been deduced logically enough from a mere glance at the structure of present-day fiction. A novel can not consist simply of a fixed picture, a description of a man in repose. It must show him acting and acted upon. In other words, it deals with man in his relation to his environment. Hence it must have two essentials, the man and his movements, that is, the characters and the story. The causes and effects of these two essentials give us two more. The man can only move as he is swayed internally by his emotions; and the movement can only be seen externally in its effect on his surroundings, his background. These four form the positive elements or content of the novel, and they must be presented under the limitations set by man's experience of life or verisimilitude, and by his

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inadequate modes of conveying ideas, his style of speech.<sup>1</sup>

The tracing of the gradual recognition of these essentials in fiction and the establishment of their principles of technique become now the subjects of this book. Let me, therefore, restate these elements, placing them somewhat roughly in the order of their prominence for my present purpose. They are:

**Relative Value  
of These  
Elements**

1. Plot.
2. Motive or Verisimilitude.
3. Character portrayal.
4. Emotional excitement. •
5. Background.
6. Style.

And let us a little further discriminate their relations and relative value.

Why does Mr. Ebers write novels instead of works on archæology? Why does not the character student copy the charming essays of Addison? The devotee of emotion or of style make poems? The enthusiast of "purpose"

<sup>1</sup>These six essentials will be found to differ not very widely from Aristotle's six parts of tragedy—Fable, Manners, Diction, Sentiments, Stage decorations and Music. Style corresponds to both Diction and Music. For Stage decorations, the novel substitutes a background of description. And Aristotle's "Sentiments" partly cover emotion as well as something of verisimilitude; for, as he phrases it, "This part includes the saying of what is proper and suited to the subject [I have seen the passage printed in translation, "what is true"; but though this idea of truth is probably included, it is not positively expressed, τοῦτο δὲ ἔστιν τὸ λεγεῖν δύνασθαι τὰ ἐνόητα καὶ τὰ ἀρμόττοντα]; it is the thing which is the function of the statesman's art and of the orator's." That, is, arousal and conviction, emotion and verisimilitude.

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preach a sermon? The answer, obvious as it is, leads us toward the essential nature of the novel. Each of these writers adopts the novel as a vehicle for expression, because thus can he reach a wider public, because people want a "story." Every one of us asks to know life, to live deeply, if not in his own emotions and experiences, then in those of others. So we listen, eagerly listen, for the "story."

There is a popular fallacy that anybody can tell a story. Every man, woman or child attempts unhesitatingly to narrate the adventure of the day; and most of them never realize just how badly they have failed, what feeble and false impressions they have given to their hearers. A story is not an exact repetition of life. No story could be that; because in life many million things are happening all around us, all at once; and of these concurrent incidents only a very small fraction have any clear connection with our tale. Perhaps a dozen of them are in fairly close and interesting relation to it. But there is always just the one detail that is for the instant most interesting, most valuable, most vital. The majority of tale-tellers manage to keep within the range of the dozen or so of related ideas; it is only genius that strikes always and inevitably upon the one.

This brings us back to what Stevenson called the novel, "a simplification." Does this one most interesting, most vital consequence usually follow each event in real life? How can it, with the million cross currents of other affairs always sweeping across our path? By the interruptions of the outside world, we lose, or we escape, the results we have deserved. The "art" of the novel does away

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with these impertinent interruptions; it avoids, except where it desires to retain, the chances and confusions of life. It invents the sequence which makes it "significant."

A novel, then, consists of the gathering of a single series of human, that is to say, emotional, events from out the vast whirl of loosely related incidents which we call "the world." It endeavors to trace a series of causes to their series of effects. Rejecting all the intervening masses of irrelevant matter which make the lessons of life so hard to read, the novel points, or should point clearly as it can, the winding of the road down which some soul has travelled, the goal which, if another mortal follow the same route, he also is most like to reach. "Quo Vadis" should be the title not of one story, but of all.

Let us, therefore, establish this as our working definition of the novel, or at least of the novel's plot. It is the

### A Working Definition

tracing of a single series of events from their causes through their various interactions to their consequences—perhaps we should not be far astray if we said the tracing of trivial and unrecognized causes to their infinite and inevitable results. The ideally perfect plot would admit into a novel not one picture, not one word, that did not bear upon the development of some such series.

This definition may be made to include most other elements of the novel as well as plot. Thus perfection of plot would presuppose absolute truth, perfection of vision. The unity of a story is really dependent on an inner and far deeper unity of soul or thought or purpose. Thus also, the most solemn consequence of any series of events is the change that they develop in some human

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soul; and so we have character study insisted on, and passion.

Perhaps the whole subject will seem clearer if we consider the novel for a moment as a set of steps. As a rule

### The Novel as a Set of Steps

these mount steadily to the end. There is no long falling action; very rarely can one find emphasized, as in the drama, a middle climax with its line of ascent and

descent. Rather, as in life, each effect becomes in its turn a cause, and so there is one long progression. To this the step diagram not inaccurately applies. The incidents form the short perpendicular lines. Each incident, each action raises the characters, and the reader also, to a higher emotional level, to a keener knowledge of one another, and a stronger interest in all. Then for a space the story moves horizontally through description or comment till the reader has grown familiar with the new level, is at home in, and can remember it. Then the story rises again. At the summit of the series the author leads us into his people's heart of hearts, gives such knowledge of them, of ourselves, of life, as it is in him to give, and leaves us to meditate in the sanctum we have reached. Or perhaps he pushes us out to drop like the rocket stick back to an ordinary world, and that, if you like, is a high condensation of tragedy's falling action.

Sometimes, to be sure, the steps fail to climb. The weakness of most of the forerunners of the novel, as of not a few works of more recent date, lies exactly here. The novelist, while plodding along his horizontal line of commentary, loses our attention, forgets the altitude he has reached, his line dips, he sends us coasting, as it were,

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down hill. Hence when his next perpendicular line of incident appears, it does but raise us to the same height as before. His novels reach no climax at all. They lack cumulative interest.

*ale of  
mutation  
solution*

In searching among the ancestors of the novel, I have found it useful to take this question of construction, of story, for a guide. Let us therefore, starting at the beginning, advance historically looking for a fully developed plot, including a series of causes, the interweaving threads of various lives, emotional excitement, rejection of extraneous matter, and persistent progress toward a result. In reaching that, we reach a novel.

The goal can not be attained by a straight arrow flight. No Roman road was laid out, with this end in view from the beginning. On the contrary, not one of the novel's six essentials has developed along uninterrupted or steadily progressive lines. The path has seemed so broken and confused that, at the more important turning points, I have placed summaries, which I would beg the reader not wholly to ignore. I may be permitted to premise that each of the other elements will be seen far advanced in technique, before we arrive at any definite recognition of the requirements of plot.

## CHAPTER III

### THE EGYPTIAN TALES

#### **The Fragmentary Manuscripts**

The earliest attempts at story telling that have come down to us unaltered are those of the Egyptians. Every decade or so produces yet another tattered manuscript from among those ancient tombs along the Nile, to convince us that the Egyptians had an extensive literature of fiction.

Unfortunately, these manuscripts seldom reach us in anything like perfect condition. The beginning is lost, or the end, and sometimes both. The tale is incomplete; its plot, its unity, can not be positively determined; and thus conclusions drawn from these manuscripts are apt to be fragmentary as themselves. With this preliminary caution, let us look to them more closely.

Among the papyri is one so much more antiquated than its fellows that its contents have the undisputed right to be called the oldest story now extant in the world.

#### **The Oldest Story**

The oldest story in the world! Considering how little this tale is generally known, considering that no history of fiction has yet taken note of it, the necessity arises of describing the story somewhat in detail. Scientifically speaking, it is the "Westcar Papyrus," and no other document except the "Book of the Dead" has been so exhaustively studied from the Egyptologist's point of view. In German there

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are several published works on it, with Erman's comprehensive study in two folio volumes at the head. Maspero among others has handled it in French. But in English we have only the little unannotated translation that Petrie gave us in 1895.

Note —  
The manuscript itself is at least as old as the beginning of the twelfth Egyptian dynasty. No more modern date, therefore, can possibly be assigned to it than about 2700 B. C. Egyptologists hesitate, however, whether to place the composition of the tale there, or in the fourth dynasty, some thirteen hundred years earlier, nearly or wholly contemporaneous, that is to say, with Cheops, the great pyramid builder, of whom it speaks. Astronomical reasons, they tell us, drawn from its references to the Nile inundations, prevent the assigning of any intermediate date.<sup>1</sup>

Four thousand years before the Christian era! It brings us back to the very childhood of civilization. Yet as between this and 2700, the student of literature will have little hesitation in referring the manuscript to the year 4000. We have other tales from the later date, the twelfth dynasty, elaborate, smooth, and even eloquent constructions, primitive but rounded works of art. They differ from the earlier story as widely as do the polished novels of a Thackeray or a Tolstoi from the crude narratives of a Malory or a Maundeville. The "Westcar Papyrus" contains just such accounts as children might tell. That is, if we suppose the children very young in

<sup>1</sup>Vide Adolf Erman, "Der Märchen des Papyrus Westcar," Berlin, 1890, Vol. I, p. 19 et seq. Vide W. F. Petrie, "Egyptian Tales," London, 1895, Vol. I, p. 58 et seq.



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intellect, yet very old in the ways of the world, fully acquainted with its vices and its vanities, though wholly incapable of moralizing thereon.

(Modern scholars have named these quaint old narratives the "Tales of the Magicians." In them the sons of King Cheops are apparently trying to amuse their father. One of the sons after another steps forward to tell the monarch a "strange story.") Our only and most precious manuscript begins with the closing words of one tale. Then follow two of the sons' stories complete, and then the opening of another longer one, in the midst of which the injured papyrus breaks off. Whether originally any larger tale connected all these and gave them a vague unity, it is impossible to say. The last story passes suddenly into action on the part of King Cheops, his sons, and others of those around them. It seems to become contemporary history, and then, alas, it disappears.

Technically, every part of the stories is confused. There is no clear separation marking the tales within tales. At times it is the scribe, the actual writer of the papyrus, who addresses us in his own person. At times King Cheops speaks. Then again, his sons carry on the narration; or yet again it is some character within the tale. Our best Egyptologists approach the manuscript with diffidence, confess they can not always discriminate the speakers, and despair of their own interpretation of doubtful passages.

Within the two smaller completed tales, however, we move with some security. They attain a certain unity, through the fact that both of them, and, so far as we can



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judge, the other fragments also, appeal always and solely to the passion for the marvellous. It is always a "strange thing" that King Cheops desires to hear, and for which he listens. He is told first of a visit paid by a former king to the "chief-reciter" of the time. In the monarch's train is a page, to whom the wife of the chief-reciter is attracted. A rather bald intrigue follows, and is revealed to the husband by a servant. Then the chief-reciter constructs a tiny magic crocodile of wax, which at his command grows huge and swallows the page. The magician, apparently proud of the situation, invites the king several days later to see this crocodile, makes it grow small and large in the presence of the monarch, and finally produces the page unhurt. The king marvels much at the power of his chief-reciter, and among other remarks, but not at all emphasized above the rest, he bids the crocodile keep its prey. He then confers on the reciter many gifts. At this juncture King Cheops reappears, expresses his wonder also at the tale, and orders sacrifices made in honor of the magician and of the king who honored him.

In the second tale, a king, being weary, appeals to his chief-reciter, who suggests with many details that the entire court might enjoy a row upon a lake. This is approved, and the trip described. One of the king's maidens drops a ring into the lake, and the chief-reciter folds back the waters as one might close an open book, and thus regains the ring. No further results are built upon this ring, nor indeed upon anything else. The magician is given high honor, and King Cheops marvels and orders sacrifices as before. In the third and unfinished

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tale, the severed head of a bull is reunited to the body, and the animal is restored to life.

Such incidents might, of course, appear in any story of magic; but the point is that here they are not incidents, they are the centre of the tale. Round them, to explain them, mentioned merely to give reason for the display of the one infantile marvel, is an entire and to us strangely interesting world. The vague, accidental background reveals a complex and unknown civilization, wherein, grouped in disconnected detail, we catch glimpses of sinful women and lollipop pages, mincing maidens and satiate kings.

Back of this appeal to wonder as the interest by which the story was expected to hold its audience, the teller's own purpose seems also fairly clear. He did more than simply try to interest his hearers, he aimed to impress them with the dignity of his own art. In each tale the mighty magician is the "chief-reciter" to the king in whose reign the events are placed. Each time this chief-reciter is highly honored by the king, treated almost as an equal. He is the triumphant hero of the story, and his enemies fall helpless before his magic art. If only we writers of to-day could so easily convince our world of our superhuman dignity and powers! Moreover the tales are narrated as grave history. The monarch, in whose reign each took place, is carefully mentioned with all his titles. Here is craft for us mingled with simplicity; wisdom with foolishness; worthy of the oldest story in the world. One doubts if a finished artist of to-day, sitting down to imagine an "oldest story," could have planned it better.

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As to the ancient tale-teller's method of making clear his appeal and driving home his teaching, the work is primitive but not without evidences of studied art. The opening sentence of the second tale is plain enough, "I will tell *of a wonder* that happened . . . by the deeds of the chief-reciter." And the close of each tale, as we have seen, represents King Cheops ordering that sacrifice be made to the spirit of the chief-reciter involved, "for I have seen the token of his wisdom."

While the scribe thus positively indicated the appeal at the start, and emphatically drew his desired conclusion, he had little conception of how to reach his effects between times. There is none of the increasing intensity, the stepping upward of which I have spoken. The events are like those of a child's tale, scattered, digressive, given in the simplest time order, and failing even to master that. The writer constantly repeats himself where repetition is most useless, a mere filling up of space. He seems to mention whatever comes to his mind, important or trivial, whether bearing on his central wonder or far removed from it, anything in fact that standing by itself may interest the hearer. Plot scarcely exists except in the vague sense that the events mentioned preceded, though they did not cause or lead up to, the work of magic. Of emotional excitement, there is none whatever. No faintest suggestion is given of the state of mind of the injured husband, the detected wife, or the devoured and redevoured page. They are dealt with in a manner wholly objective, and go through their parts like so many automata merely that the crocodile may appear.

## THE EGYPTIAN TALES

To summarize, therefore, what can here be found of the six elements, to what extent they were employed at the earliest point of fiction within modern view:

### Technique at its Beginning

1. *Plot*—not recognized as a unit.

There is no sequence of cause and effect, no separation of incidents, no cumulative intensity.

2. *Motive*—plainly announced. Verisimilitude is wholly rejected. The aim of the tale is almost directly opposed to the portrayal of real life; it seeks to astonish, to present marvels, and to win an unearned honor, a false reputation, for the teller's profession.

3. *Character portrayal*—not thought of. Figures are shown without detail and only as the eye had seen them, not as the heart knew them.

4. *Emotional excitement*—none.

5. *Background*—wholly accidental. The details mentioned slip in like uncounted chatter, and in no way aid the expression of the point, the magic climax of the tale.

6. *Style*—very crude. It shows some evidences of art and even of formulæ for opening and closing, but the writer has not at all considered the general form of the tale nor recognized its difficulties.

(Turning from the "Westcar Papyrus," the next oldest remnant of Egyptian fiction belongs to the ninth dynasty, say roughly about the year 3100 B.C.)

### The Progress of Artistic Skill

In this the reader at once becomes conscious of a great advance in art, an extremely self-conscious art. The narrator tells plainly and with easy simplicity and fullness the details of how a peasant or "sekhti" was tricked and

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robbed by the servant of a noble, and of the peasant's appeal to the noble for justice. Only after this is the real intent of the author developed, and we find ourselves facing (an evident example of a "purpose-story," that is, a story which is only one by courtesy, a mere vehicle for conveying some extraneous idea. The author of (the "sekhti" manuscript) wrote to glorify eloquence, to show the value of his own art, the power of the well-trained tongue. He actually counts on winning attention not by events but by words.

The sekhti approaches the noble with a long and very flowery speech. As soon as it is finished some explanations are hurriedly given to lead on to another similar outburst by the sekhti, and then comes another, and yet others and others. Over each of these addresses the author lingers with elaborate and loving art, and then scurries hastily to the next. Never was a story more obviously composed as a mere vehicle for fine writing. The noble has the peasant's speeches copied out and sent to the king, that his majesty may enjoy their eloquence; and both noble and king deliberately delay justice to the sekhti so as to give occasion for more of his poetic entreaties and orations. Nay, they even have him savagely beaten as a stimulus to further efforts of his genius.

The close of the tale is confused, but apparently the king amply rewards the orator for all he has endured. Kings always do reward the hero in Egyptian tales. Except for that, there is not a marvel, not a single wonder in the whole.

It must be evident that, to such a story, plot in the full

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sense of the word was impossible. Here is no tracing of human causes and results. The writer cares absolutely nothing for such things. Probably he never expected any one to accept the event as actually happening. It was a fancy, an ideal. Any sympathy with the peasant's sufferings or even any real passion on the sufferer's part would at once have destroyed all interest in his artificial eloquence. Yet there is a certain unity throughout, a unity not elsewhere found in Egyptian tales, and arising from the author's very intensity of purpose, his steady looking to only one idea. There are no superfluous incidents, because the writer did not want incidents at all. He crowded them aside, he told only such as were absolutely necessary.

Neither does study of character exist, any more than in the "Tales of the Magicians." In fact, in all the Egyptian stories, the characters are what is called "plot ridden," though in this one case it were perhaps better to call them "purpose ridden"; that is they act in any impossible or inconsistent way necessary to produce a desired situation. Here the eloquent peasant, his friends, and his enemies are, without explanation and apparently without realization, turned about in any contradictory way that can give the author opportunity for a speech.

To the student of literature it is very interesting to find fiction so early reaching this stage of its development. Here is obviously a notable advance. The "art of the tongue" has been recognized. Its power is proven and admired. This was the natural step that fiction had to take. Like man himself, it had to become self-conscious. It had to think of itself that it could study itself, learn

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its own beauties and its follies, its weaknesses and its power.

But before we smile at the self-complacent artist with his impossible peasant and his over-ornate metaphors, let us look back at our own Euphues, or abroad, at the chivalric romances whose involved love-arguments and labored compliments turn poor Quixote's brain. "The reasonableness of the unreason with which you overcome my reasoning, so manifestly weakens my reason, that I reasonably lament your beauty." It is evident, and indeed it seems but natural, that all arts must pass through this stage of false pretentiousness. Has not painting done the same? And poetry? And architecture? Have they all passed quite beyond it even yet? Fiction, like the others, when first waking from the fresh carelessness of unformed nature and realizing that it is an art, loses itself in the study of its own means, the love of its own workmanship.

(If we now pass swiftly over a thousand years or more to the later Egyptian tales of about the nineteenth dynasty, we find these in some respects much advanced over their predecessors. They are longer, they are far more involved, they have interwoven threads. In this at least they approach nearer to the novel. Yet in some other ways their art seems almost to have stood still. The Egyptians had ceased to be a progressive people.

Perhaps the tale that comes nearest to our modern conception of a completed story is that of Prince Stne. This is the longest, the most elaborate, and in many ways the most important of the surviving Egyptian fragments. In



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the tale, Stne or Setna, to follow Professor Petrie's English spelling, appears in the tomb of one of his predecessors, having apparently entered to seize a magic book; for, where the surviving manuscript begins, the spirit wife of the dead king is warning Setna to leave the book. She tells him the whole story of her life, of her husband's magic labors to secure the book, and of how it led to both their deaths. Setna still persists, and, after a struggle of magic with the dead king, succeeds in carrying off his prize. The dead king then sends a woman to entrap the thief. She leads Setna into endless troubles and disasters, which are expanded at some length. Setna at last realizes that he is inferior to his enemy in power, and brings back the magic book. The dead king then commands him to find and transfer to the tomb the body of the king's spirit wife, which has been interred in another city. After considerable labor Setna accomplishes this mission, and the tale is over.

The method of this story is still, as in the earlier ones, wholly objective; and the emotional intensity one would naturally expect in many of the situations is only expressed in the baldest way, as, for example, "Then Setna was afraid and fled." Yet we can see that as a whole the tale approaches somewhat to our modern conception of unity of plot, and perhaps that conception will be made clearer by pointing out just where the Setna story fails of reaching it. This is an account either of the living prince or of the dead king. If it is the latter, as indeed it comes nearest to being, then the entire and lengthy series of episodes between Setna and the magic woman who beguiles him should be left out. They have no value for

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the dead king; on the contrary, they quite lead us to forget him. If, on the other hand, this is the tale of Setna, then all the long story of the spirit wife should be abridged; and the ending is wrong, for it is the close of her career, not his. Or, if we call it the tale of the magic book, then it should end when Setna restores that to its place. The interest for the reader is switched abruptly from one to another of these themes while the others disappear. There is amid the parts an utter disjointedness only fully to be realized by reading them.

Why did not the Egyptian scribe see these points, and make his tale of one sort or the other? The answer seems obviously enough to be that he was not telling of any of these things or persons in particular. Human emotion, human life, was not his theme. He was, like his predecessors, telling of "strange things," and it was by their strangeness that he expected to hold his audience. Whether the events happened to one person or another made little difference. The characters might have all died or disappeared and been replaced by new ones, and still the tale go on—an accident which actually happens in the similar story of Bata and his transformations.

(The story of Bata is more widely known to the general public than any other of the Egyptian fictions, and perhaps from the general public's standpoint, it is best worth knowing. Like the "Tales of the Magicians," it exists in only a single manuscript; but this has been longer known. It was purchased for the British Museum in 1857, and since then several Egyptologists of note have offered us translations of its hieroglyphics. Its

**The Most  
Famous  
Tale**

## THE EGYPTIAN TALES

opening is notably different from anything in the other tales. Bata is a peasant, and the simple details of his peasant life are dwelt on as though the scribe took genuine pleasure in them. That is to say, the tone of the earlier passages is idyllic. Bata's toil in the fields is described, his going out and returning home, his loving care of the cattle. The beasts inform him where the best pastures are, and he takes them there, so that they grow fat and strong.

This incident of the cattle brings us to a very interesting point. To substitute for a hieroglyphic a modern word which expresses its general significance, has become a fairly easy matter; but we must often despair of deciding just exactly the idea which the symbol conveyed to an ancient Egyptian's mind. Mr. Griffith's translation indicates that the cattle spoke to Bata. M. Maspero thinks we come nearer to the Egyptian sense if we say they "made him understand."<sup>1</sup> The one idea keeps us in the old world of magic—telling "strange things." The other brings us to a far more modern and delicate picture of the peasant's real sympathy with and comprehension of the dumb brutes he tends. It lends the final touch to the idyllic simplicity of the opening of the tale.

Bata lives with his elder brother, and the story runs along the lines of the Bible narrative of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. The brother, to avenge his fancied wrongs, hides behind the cowshed door to slay Bata as he drives in the cattle; but again the beasts speak to their attendant, each one as it enters warning him of the hid-

<sup>1</sup>Vide "Les Contes Populaires de L'Egypte Ancienne," Paris, 1882, p. 8 et seq.

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den foe. Here again the slow dawning of the idea on Bata's mind from their successive speeches suggests the other translation, that not by articulate words but by their actions his dumb friends "made him understand."

He flees, is pursued by his brother; and now the tale throws off all its opening simplicity and becomes the usual catalogue of marvels. A river full of alligators gapes between the brothers. The guilty wife is slain. Bata becomes a hermit, and the gods make him a spirit wife. Bata is slain at her instigation. She becomes the favorite of the king. Bata is magically resurrected by his brother, who then passes out of the tale, while Bata goes through endless transformations, in each of which his former wife seeks his destruction. Finally she succeeds. A son is born to her, and having grown up becomes king. He then declares himself a reincarnation of Bata; and the former favorite, first his wife and afterward his mother, is "judged" by him. The punishment inflicted is left to be understood, though this frequently recurring symbol "judged" seems to imply the death sentence. For the sake of our common human nature, let us hope the judgment took a milder form.

What are we to argue from this tale? One or two new lines of technique seem to appear. Perhaps it has a moral purpose; persecuted innocence finally triumphs over its assailants. Yet on the whole Bata is far too powerful for persecuted innocence; he is more like a god, against whom enemies plot in vain. He foresees the future; magic makes him an easy victor.

(So, too, in the early part of the tale we have perhaps an attempt at an appeal to something other in man's na-

## THE EGYPTIAN TALES

ture than his appetite for marvels.) The author for a moment seems to touch real poetry, to expect his readers to enjoy the simple beauty of the simplest forms of life and labor. Possibly, however, it is only our modern fancy that infuses these feelings into passages where the scribe's real purpose was but to draw a contrast with the hero's final greatness.

Considering these later tales as a whole, they no longer possess the plain-spoken simplicity with which the earlier writers indicated their underlying effort: "Honor the chief-reciter," "Behold the beauty of eloquence." In fact one doubts whether the later scribes made any effort, except the obvious professional one of pleasing. If they had really some deeper intent, the faintness of our knowledge of their times prevents us from detecting it.

When we search for unity of plot, or indeed for any clear conception of what plot means, we find ourselves disappointed. There is not one among the later tales which reaches even to the barren singleness of the story of the sekhti. The moment an Egyptian story becomes lengthy, it becomes heterogeneous. The fragments fall apart. They are different, incoherent, sometimes almost antipathetic.

The method of appeal remains the same as in the earliest legends. It is still man's appetite for the marvellous that is being fed, though the supernatural exhibitions are far more intricate, more subtle and mysterious than the simple matter of the wax crocodile. Moreover, they are much more numerous to the tale, scattered with a liberal

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

hand and a practised fancy. Some of the narratives show also that a second and different method of exciting wonder had been originated. Men travel into strange lands, and bring thence accounts of things not necessarily magical, but merely beyond the experience of their neighbors. Fiction thus takes its first vague turn toward verisimilitude; it seems approaching what Professor Matthews has declared to be its earliest advance—from the impossible to the merely improbable.<sup>1</sup>

To summarize, therefore, once again, we have in the latest Egyptian fiction:

1. *Plot*—partly conceived. There are slightly interweaving threads, but these break off; characters are suddenly abandoned; there is no unity and no progression of incident.

2. *Motive*—more complex than in the earlier tales. There is possibly a first vague striving for verisimilitude. The tale still seeks to amaze rather than convince, yet perhaps the author looks faintly to a higher truth, has begun an attempt to teach.

3. *Character portrayal*—none.

4. *Emotional excitement*—faintly suggested in some stories, rather effectively depicted early in the Bata tale, but wholly forgotten in the latter part.

5. *Background*—perhaps intentionally brought out early in the Bata tale, not elsewhere.

6. *Style*—always objective, but undramatic, elaborate, often poetic, but running markedly to the use of formulæ of expression, hence stiff.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Vide "The Historical Novel," 1901, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup>It must not be supposed that it was only in Egypt that fiction

## THE EGYPTIAN TALES

found congenial soil. The drama and even the poetic form itself have been overlooked by some races in their literary advance; but the fictitious tale has too universal a root, is, as we have seen, too integral a part of man, to fail of cultivation. No race so poor but has its fantasies and romances! The Chinese knew fiction early; indeed, the first and most sacred of all their books, the Yi King or Book of Changes, so old that Confucius himself failed fully to understand it, whose author is a mythical Fuh-hi, and whose date has been doubtfully guessed at 2852 B. C., is perhaps of this nature. Traces of intentional romance may be found too in the oldest of the sacred books of the Hindus—boastful battle-songs, the wooing of a nymph by her lover. These date from about 1500 B. C., while the later Hindu books, the great epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, still far antedating the Christian era, are barely masqued fiction of the broadest type. In the Ramayana the hero leads an army of monkeys to battle; one of them, with tail of fire, runs with magic speed over the enemy's country and sets it everywhere aflame. Men slay armies; women receive the gift of eternal youth and beauty. The demon king stills wave and wind with his frown. This is, perhaps, the highest type of fiction so early encountered. There is a suggestion of a double meaning running all through it. It is allegory as well as fiction. So, too, are the beast fables. To whatever country we assign these, and whether their author be Pilpai, Bidpay, Æsop, Lokman or some older, forgotten scribe, they are an important part of pre-Christian fiction. The Hindus claim them as a natural growth from the laws of Manu; but the subject is too wide for discussion here.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GREEK ROMANCES

**Earliest  
Traces of  
Greek Fiction**

Along some of the lines whose development leads to the novel, the Greek romances present considerable advance. On other lines, however, the progress is so slight as to be rather surprising. The Greeks, who made such tremendous advances in art, who in the drama, the form most closely approaching the novel, arrived at such complete though perhaps instinctive appreciation of the unities and other points of technique—these artists failed to apply their analytic power to the novel.

Fiction remained the least developed of Grecian arts. The Greek mind of the true classic period seems to have rejected it altogether, as trivial. Romance to win a hearing had to appear as handmaid to her sister arts of poetry and oratory, to assume the guise of history as in Homer, or of religion, as in Hesiod. Stories, told simply for their value as stories, and especially prose stories, do not appear at all until the post-classic period, and then they step forward in a form almost infantile when compared with the splendor of the other arts of Greece.

Even the Milesian tales, trifles apparently very short and very broad, are not referred to as existing before the year 54 B. C., though their composition probably began a couple of centuries earlier. A fragment of a romance about Nimrod of Babylon has been recently discovered,



## THE GREEK ROMANCES

dating from the beginning of the Christian era ; but there is not enough of this to serve as a groundwork for any very positive conclusions. To the writer it seems much more Eastern than Greek, like a descendant of the Egyptian tales translated into the dominant tongue.

The first Grecian tale, presented simply as a tale, of which the present age can speak with any positiveness is

**The  
Oldest  
Romance**                    the "Dinias and Dercyllis" of Antonius Diogenes (circa 150 A. D.), though even this is known only from its abridgment in the "Myriobiblion" of Photius.

Antonius Diogenes claims to have gathered much of his material from earlier writers, and indeed the story has obviously behind it a long ancestry, toward which the student gazes with vain and unappeasable curiosity. He only catches glimpses of a feeble Greek fiction emerging as by accident from Grecian decadence.

Even at this late period of Greek life romance appears to be still in its infancy. "Dinias and Dercyllis" enables us to pick up the development of plot and verisimilitude at almost the point where the Egyptians left them. It is a narrative of magical adventures and marvellous travelings "beyond Thule" and in the sun and moon. It still appeals to wonder as its source of interest, and describes wholly impossible things to a people who had as yet no scientific conception of the limits set by the strict laws of Nature.

Love, which, except for the incident of Setna and his temptress, had remained a wholly subordinate detail in the Egyptian galaxy of the marvellous, begins to be more important, though still a minor matter. It is used, rather

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

stiffly, to connect the two chief characters; but the hero, Dinias, has his set of travels and adventures entirely apart from those of the lady, Dercyllis, whom he meets in his wanderings and leaves again. Nevertheless, in all Greek fiction the story is of the two, not the one. The Egyptians told of the man, the Greeks of the man and woman. This is more than a mere technical advance, it marks a change in the conception of life itself. It testifies to at least some vague beginning of "emotional excitement," and justifies our calling the Greek stories "romances," whereas those of Egypt were only "tales."

The mechanism by which the narrative is carried on has become much more artificial, if not more artful, than among the Egyptians. The "chief-reciters" simply spoke out their own inventions. It never occurred to them to guarantee the truth of the narrative, to explain how they personally came to know of the events described. But the Greek author has no official position as a "reciter"; he must justify his right to speak. In this first story, Dinias is supposed to dictate the endless series of his wanderings to a friend, who incloses the record in the hero's tomb, where it is discovered by the soldiers of Alexander the Great, and passed down through the generations to the author, Antonius. In short, the Greek novelists realized the great advantage to be gained by telling a tale in the first person. They overlooked, however, or else disapproved, the simple and frankly artificial modern style where the author poses as being his own hero and in this guise speaks directly to his public. The Greeks employed instead an elaborate machinery. Character after character is introduced into the tales simply

## THE GREEK ROMANCES

as a sort of ancient phonograph, listening open-mouthed to the hero's narrative of his own heroic deeds, and then recording the words for the benefit of other friends.

As to the unity of plot, there is none, nor apparently had any method of arranging incidents dawned upon the author, except the primeval one of following the strict time order. This makes the complicated series of narratives become almost hopelessly involved. Dinias starts his tale where he himself leaves home, and he continues his adventures until he meets Dercyllis; then he branches off into what she had told him of her wanderings, in the midst of which she had met her brother, an interruption which of course demanded that the brother should tell his story, and then came others within that. Thus the narrative reaches the fourth, or even higher, degrees of involution. As each story is completed, the next larger one is resumed, and so at last we return to the unwearied Dinias, who promptly resumes his own almost forgotten adventures, dismisses Dercyllis to her home and continues, perhaps with a certain amount of relief, his more personal wanderings. The author does not, however, wholly forget the heroine; for it is when Dinias finally visits and weds her at her home in Tyre that the narrative stops.

The fact that this story survives only in an abridgment prevents us from estimating with any accuracy the real amount of emotion involved; but this seems to be very slight. Dercyllis and her brother are indeed terrified by a mistaken fear that they have slain their parents; but the fear seems only emphasized as an excuse for their flight and wanderings; their grief is scarcely noted. Dinias is said to love Dercyllis, but he obviously loves

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

✓ adventure far more. As to character study or development, there is none whatever. Dinias is any man, Dercyllis any maiden. Their minds seem quite unchanged by their tumultuous experiences, and at the close of their adventures they might, had author and reader not been both awearied, have begun their travels all over again in the same spirit.

A summary, therefore, of this earliest remnant of Greek fiction would stand somewhat as follows:

### Technique in the First Romance

1. *Plot*—faintly conceived as a thin thread holding together various adventures, but having no importance and no value whatever as showing cause and consequence.

2. *Motive*—none clearly indicated except the desire to interest. Verisimilitude is openly rejected, dead folk are brought to life again, magic appears at every turn. Hearers, it seems, were still listening for "strange things," not truth. Professor Warren suggests that a lesson is perhaps being preached—"girls should stay at home." But if so, it is very unconvincingly announced.

3. *Character portrayal*—none.

4. *Emotional excitement*—presumably existent (a Greek familiar with Greek lyric and drama could scarce have overlooked it) but not made prominent, and certainly not cumulative.

5. *Background*—the abridgment has none, but the original tale probably gave this much attention. Later Greek tales do so, and this one is markedly a traveller's account of other lands.

6. *Style*—finer points unmeasurable in an abridgment,

## THE GREEK ROMANCES

but the general arrangement very crude in its involution and complicated machinery.

The first of the Greek novelists who adopted Horace's dictum to plunge into the midst of the action, the first,

**The Most Famous of the Greek Romances** that is, to adapt to the novel the technique which its sister arts of literature had already learned, was apparently that uncertain Heliodorus, who may or may

not have been the well-known bishop of Tricca in Thessaly. At any rate, a Heliodorus wrote "Theagenes and Chariclea," the best and most famous of the surviving Greek romances. The tale steps suddenly and dramatically into its action—if anything can be called sudden in those interminably prolix narratives. The hero, Theagenes, lies wounded in the arms of his beloved Chariclea. They have just been shipwrecked, and around them lie the corpses of a whole band of the robbers of the inhospitable coast. These, we learn, had fought among themselves for the possession of Chariclea, until only a few were left, whom Theagenes had managed to dispatch. He had been wounded in the encounter, and now there appears a fresh band of robbers to carry off the helpless lovers. This much is told in the author's own person, but soon afterward the regular machinery is introduced. Calasiris, an aged companion of the lovers, has escaped the shipwreck; and, to give him ample leisure, he escapes the pirates as well. He then patiently begins to narrate to a chance listener the entire history of his own affairs and those of Theagenes and Chariclea, from their births. Other narratives intrude, and soon we are almost as deep in complications and detached episodes as in the earlier works.

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Yet despite these intricacies Heliodorus had some conception of giving a connected story. His lovers do not wander aimlessly, as did Dinias, through utterly aimless adventures. Having been separated, they struggle constantly to find each other, and when at last they escape all persecution and are happily united, the tale ends. Moreover, Heliodorus offers our earliest example of intrigue, as distinguished from plot.

By intrigue, as has been previously said, is meant some secret within the story, carefully involved and hidden from some of the characters if not from the reader. This mystery has usually the twofold purpose of letting the reader puzzle over it as he proceeds, and then of establishing the dénouement by its solution in the end. Only the latter object is attempted in "Theagenes and Chariclea." There is a birth secret about the heroine; but it is frankly told the reader, and is only employed in the end, when its sudden revelation saves the lovers from execution—though the rescue can scarcely be considered a surprise, for Greek readers of romance must long before have grown assured that their heroes and heroines never died beyond recall. It would have been unprofessional.

The mere thread of a connected story is to be found in Jamblichus, an earlier writer; but it is Heliodorus who seems first to have conceived his story as a whole, and not as a mere succession of marvellous adventures and escapes on the part of any character who chances to enter into the narrator's brain.

With this growing sense of unity, there comes also an increased emphasis given to the emotional side of the

## THE GREEK ROMANCES

work. Heliodorus really hoped to interest readers as much by love and pity as by wonder. He no longer wrote for utterly childish gapers after marvels; he appealed to hearts as well as eyes. His audience might still stare, but they also *felt*. Love, base or noble, is made the dominant motive of several characters. Affection holds sway over others, or revenge, or gratitude.

The background is elaborately worked in, employed even with a recognition of its technical purpose and subordinate position. In this connection there appears in the third book of "Theagenes and Chariclea" the earliest of those self-conscious expressions of opinion about the narrator's art, the first of those deliberate analyses of its own technique of which more modern fiction has become so fond. " 'When the ceremony was over, and the procession had passed by,' continued Calasiris—'But,' said Cnemon, interrupting him, 'the ceremony is not over, Father; you have not made me a spectator of the procession, whereas I am very desirous both of hearing and seeing; you treat me like a guest, who, as they say, is come a day after the feast: why should you just open the theatre, only to close it again?'—'I was unwilling,' said Calasiris, 'to detain you from what you are most desirous to know, by a detail which has little or nothing to do with the principal end of my narration; but since you must be a passing spectator . . . I will endeavor briefly to describe the exhibition to you; and I shall do so the more willingly, on account of the consequences which followed it.'"<sup>1</sup> Then follow several pages of mere description—background with a vengeance.

<sup>1</sup>Vide Rowland Smith's translation "Greek Romances" (Bohn, 1855), p. 62.

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So, too, the hero and heroine, while plot-ridden and really characterless, are at least elaborately pictured. "I think I see them," says a listener to the talkative Calasiris, "in your living description."<sup>1</sup> But it was only the outside, the physical outlines that he had been made to see.

One further bit of development almost reached by Heliodorus is fully attained by his followers. They entirely abandon the use of magic. Audiences have become scientists, or at least most suspicious critics. They will believe only natural occurrences, though these still continue to be so stupendously improbable that to the modern mind the increase of possibility is infinitesimal.

The author of "Dinias and Dercyllis," desiring his heroine temporarily dead, killed her without any hesitation, and brought her to life again by magic. So, too, the Egyptians had treated death as a mere incident, not a finality. Achilles Tatius, most celebrated of the followers of Heliodorus, dares not so easily dispose of an inconvenient lady. He has his heroine slain only in appearance. Her body is ripped open by foes in full sight of the hero. But in anticipation of just such a remarkable attack, she has been secretly supplied by friends with a bladder of blood, which the foes by mistake rip open instead of her body. She is then carried away; and no one is so unkind as to deprive the hero of his picturesque lamentations by explaining to him the nature of the little comedy. Later, in the same tale, a girl marvellously re-

<sup>1</sup>Vide Smith's "Greek Romances," p. 66.



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sembling the heroine in face and figure is dressed in her clothes and slain, "for truly" this time, in the hero's path for his private edification. How poor Achilles Tatius must have racked his brain for these expedients, envied the earlier artist's easy path, and bemoaned his own hard lot that had fallen on such an exacting age!

With this vague approach toward verisimilitude, toward human life and a merely human story, came the constant weakening of wonder and adventure and the substitution of love as the basis of appeal to the reader. This emotional strengthening and unifying of the work brings us steadily nearer to the conception of unity of plot. By the time we reach the fifth century of our era, we find Longus making love the one essential element of a comparatively brief romance.

Longus, if that be indeed his name, seems to have created the pastoral. His "Loves of Daphnis and Chloe" discards wonder except as an adornment, discards adventure even, and dwells almost solely for its interest on the wakening and satisfying of the love instinct in these two young peasants among their sheepfolds.

Can man never mount a hobby but he rides it to the death? He had discovered one of the novel's essentials—passion, emotional excitement. In love he had a central interest to replace the waning appetite for the marvellous. Instantly he hurried his new mount on, exaggerated, burlesqued it—unintentionally enough—till it failed from under him. The Greek romances after Longus dwindled, as did all things Grecian, to decadence and final extinction, without originality, without power, clinging desperately to that one talisman, love, which toward the last

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was become hopelessly perverted and misunderstood. "Hysminias and Hysmene," perhaps the most notable of these closing attempts, is almost pathetic in its feeble futility. The heroine makes all the love and runs all the risks, while the hero protests, laughs at her languidly, and sleeps—sleeps in positions whose excitement would seem irresistible. One could almost suspect the author of a parody on his own degenerate art: the protest against what the world demanded to read, the languid laugh that they could still believe love was such as this, and then—the sleep. With that laugh and that sleep, Greek romance faded fittingly and decorously from life's stage.

In running thus rapidly through the later Greek romances, I have drawn attention mainly to their points of difference from the modern novel, that is, to their lack of unity or true plot, their apparent absence of any decided motive except to please the reader and thus put money in the purse of the writer, and their first vague efforts after verisimilitude, the shift from the impossible to the stupendously improbable.

If from plot and motive and the increasing demand which these began to make for realism, we look to our other points of question, we find emotion made for a time the most important feature of the tales. The value of the background has been recognized, and it is even at times perhaps too much enlarged. In "Hysminias and Hysmene" the author plays with felicities and infelicities of language as though the sound meant more than sense. Style is, of course, an element which passes readily from

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one form of literature to another; and a people who had so distinguished themselves as orators, as poets, and as historians, were not likely to lose their eloquence when they turned to fiction. There are passages of Achilles Tatius, or more especially of Chariton in his "Chæreas and Callirrhoe," which fairly bubble over with the joy of word painting. The stock exercises of the Sophist schools, such as "a storm at sea," are essayed with a school boy's seriousness and a true pedant's pride. Chariton knew all the tricks of the trade, and could have given lessons in rhetoric to many a modern.

Character drawing is also a point of technique which easily oversteps the novel, to appear in other forms of literature. Hence one is rather disappointed that the Greeks developed its possibilities no further. Any one of the Greek romance heroes or heroines might be substituted for any other. They are types, not individuals. Lanier suggests what is perhaps the reason when, in asserting that individuality has been vastly developed since Grecian times, he points out that even Euripides thought of himself not as an infinitely separate bit of selfhood, but as one of a race of very similar animals.

So writers of romance made their heroes all alike and their old men all alike, and the only point in which they advanced beyond the Egyptians was that at least their characters remain occasionally consistent with themselves and the type to which they belong. As to character development, the change caused in the person by the experiences undergone in the tale, it was still wholly unconsidered.

Thus the technical summary here, taking some vast

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strides forward over ground soon to be lost again, would be:

1. *Plot*—plainly existent. A series of causes and consequences with interweaving threads is begun and ended; but the plot lacks unity, is often interrupted by large quantities of extraneous matter, and it has nothing whatever of the dramatic quality of rising to a climax, it still moves through a succession of detached adventures.

2. *Motive*—varied. Verisimilitude is insisted on in a labored way which approaches the comic. The writer's twofold purpose to amaze and yet convince becomes self-contradictory. Lesson he has none to convey. Some works seem chiefly impelled by the æsthetic pleasure of the artist in word music or in picture painting.

3. *Character study*—still unemployed. The descriptions are of externals. But characters are fairly self-consistent.

4. *Emotional excitement*—very prominent, often the chief effect attempted. In all of the surviving writers except Longus, however, it is only used in short outbreaks, rising and falling repeatedly. Longus seems really to seek for its cumulative effect, to make it rise for a time higher and higher, though he stepped aside from the climax, did not use its final outburst.

5. *Background*—rather overdone, a marked contrast to the Egyptian work. The large space given to this background causes Greek tales, otherwise similar to the Egyptian, to extend to far greater length.

6. *Style*—fully studied, self-conscious and over-elaborate.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The product of fiction among the Romans was so small in

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quantity, and so similar to that of Greece in quality, that a separate study of it seems unnecessary here. The only Latin work of distinctive interest in the line of fiction's technique is the remarkable "Encolpius" of Petronius Arbiter. This shows a most interesting affinity to the Spanish picaresque tales of a more recent civilization. But the "Encolpius" was an isolated outburst of genius. Such parts of it as are fiction had apparently neither antecedents nor imitators. Unless we assume that the Spanish picaresque writers of the sixteenth century read and copied Petronius, his book had no appreciable influence on the development of fiction.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MEDIÆVAL CONGLOMERATES

**A Review of the Early Development of Fiction** Before approaching a newer and more vital literature than that of the decadent Greek romance, let me restate briefly the steps by which fiction seems to have progressed in ancient days. It had advanced in harmony with the progress of man. Beginning with his infancy, it had followed him step by step in his development, not representing, as do poetry and ethical writings, the aspirations of the leaders, but accurately indicating the position of that mass of really intelligent secondary minds that follow the vanguard, just a step behind. Fiction must first have shown as an art when man's waking self-consciousness led him to intentional exaggeration. Its first great step was the substitution of the wholly imaginary tale for the merely enlarged one. Then came the art's own recognition of itself as an art, involving self-study, experiment, and a craftsman's delight in the handling of his tools, pride in the wording for the mere word's sake.

For interest, fiction appealed at first to simple wonder, gradually expanding on this till the very over-elaboration and more manifest impossibility of its marvels wrought their own downfall, and compelled stories to assume the appearance of "every-day" truth. Under this restraint wonder ceased to be all-sufficient for interest, and gradu-

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ally love was substituted for it as the prime mover of the tale. Crude character study began also to appear; the reader, the common man, was becoming an analyst.

Thus far only can classic fiction carry us, for only thus far did it advance. The next step was to be the birth of moral feeling, the sense of moral responsibility on the part of the writer, the introduction of more serious purpose into the tale. And this step was obviously impossible in a period of moral decadence.

If this reading of the causes and changes in the advance of fiction appears partly theoretical, it assumes

**The Origin of  
Modern  
Fiction** more the stability of assured truth when we check and compare it with the rise of the present novel. In this we have a wholly new development with a new

race, yet it follows essentially the same lines. Greek romance, with all its really noteworthy advances in technique, had disappeared with all things Grecian, and it was not until the close of the sixteenth century that its fragments were resuscitated from forgotten corners of dreamy monasteries and translated into modern tongues. Then, indeed, Heliodorus and Chariton and Longus had a lesson to teach, an influence to exert on fiction. But by that time the creation of the modern novel was almost complete; it had grown up from other sources; and one may fairly question whether the republication of Greek romance did not retard rather than assist the new development.

Modern fiction has spread upward from the people, not downward from the scholars. The learned mediæval Dry-as-dust, stumbling on its crude beginnings, passed

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them with contempt. Seldom indeed until our own day have scholars stooped to fictitious narrative. Thus the novel finds its appropriate source among the unlearned, among those unlettered child Teutons, whose warrior strength so easily outmatched an enervate antiquity.

✓ The earlier tales of the Teutons have been preserved only in verse. In that ponderously monumental history of fiction by Dunlop, to which most of the modern discussion of the novel looks back, the author adopts a line of demarcation between verse and prose and, adhering to it rigidly, discusses only "prose fiction." This seems legitimate enough in a work which aims chiefly to be a descriptive catalogue of a vast number of books. The author merely saves himself a certain amount of labor, just as he might have done by limiting himself to books whose titles began in the first half of the alphabet. Such a line of exclusion is, however, impossible in a work of the present character. In examining Greek fiction it was unnecessary to consider Homer; because the Greek epic always retained its superhuman outlook, its national amplitude, and was thus a wholly separate art, the influence of which on Greek romance was no greater than that of other arts. In the mediæval world, on the contrary, tales in verse and tales in prose were wholly similar in spirit, and passed frequently from one outward garb to the other. Only during the Renaissance period did the verse tales, under the influence of antique models, develop artistically and formally away from prose, and establish for themselves a conscious and separate technique. Hence for the present discussion the exclusion of the mediæval



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stories in verse would be a purely arbitrary distinction, a deliberate shutting of the eyes to much that will some day be learned.

The oldest surviving monument of Teutonic narrative is the "Beowulf." The origin of this remarkable epic

**Beowulf** need not here concern us. It may have been, as its critics suggest, part nature myth, part history, a gathering of many fragments; but when in its final form it was sung to the wild English Saxon warriors, it had become a straightforward tale accepted by the listeners as a record of human life. How much credence they gave it as actually, historically happening, we can not say. Perhaps they trusted it as guilelessly as the ordinary casual reader trusts our histories of to-day. Perhaps they never gave it the acceptance and importance which the Greeks gave to the "Iliad." Pure history, "Beowulf" obviously is not, but an invention, man-made, with its incoherent parts put consciously together by an effort of human skill. Indeed in dealing with all the earlier mediæval fiction the word "conglomerate" irresistibly suggests itself. The tales seem so helplessly devoid of unity, of any single, all-pervading life within; they are so obviously bits swept accidentally together, hammered together from without.

"Beowulf" is such a conglomerate. In one way it carries the student back to an even earlier stage of literary development than is represented by the Egyptian tales. Magic in its full sense has not yet appeared. The story teller had but reached the period when the hero's victory over all human foes had become matter of course, and palled upon the ear. He must have superhuman foes to

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fight, Grendel, the marsh fiend, and the old hag his mother, who lives beneath the bottomless pool.

The distinction between this use of the merely super-human and the employment of magic, is an important one, as marking the progress toward verisimilitude, the awakening of the critic sense. The marsh fiend's flesh is impervious to sword-stroke, yet Beowulf hews off his head. An Eastern tale would have introduced a mystic ointment or an enchanted weapon to explain this success in the impossible. Beowulf, plunging boldly, sinks a whole summer's day through the waters of the bottomless tarn, fights the hag there in the twilight shadows of her den, then rises to the surface again. A later hero would have possessed some charm to enable him to breathe amid his unnatural surroundings. The difficulty probably never occurred to the early Saxon mind. Or if it did, the chain of reasoning was simple: "I can by great exertion exist under water a minute, maybe two. Beowulf did it for a whole day. He was thus much the greater."

Another distinction even more valuable than this simplicity of belief may be noted as separating the early Teutonic tales from those of the East, a distinction in which perhaps lies the explanation why the one has lived, while the other died. The old fiction faded into unlamented desuetude; the new has reached already a level infinitely beyond its predecessor, yet rises ever higher, with no sign of weakening or decay. The difference lies in the greater virility, the inherent force, the courage, of the more Northern race. Beowulf, it is true, outrages nature in that lengthy plunge; but what Eastern hero would have attempted it at all? Or to turn for illustration to an Ice-

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landic tale, what Eastern hero would, like Grettir in the saga of "Grettir the Strong," have waited, of set purpose, for a troll, a demon dwelling in a decayed human corpse, wrestled through a whole night with the ghoulish monster, body to body, until at last, with face smothered deep in the troll's dank beard, he broke the thing's back and slowly crushed the demon life out of it in defiance of its heart-withering curse?

The Eastern tales, the Eastern heroes, were made of no such fibre as this. Such strength it was not in them even to imagine. The Egyptian sailor of the "Isle of Snakes" tells us he has a heart "greater than a lion," yet he constantly "lay on his face" before the serpents and "held his arms low" to them. Grettir would have known his place in creation better; he knew that he, not the serpent, was earth's master. Clitophon, in the Grecian masterpiece of Tattius, is even more slavish in his submission to the beatings of his master. Fancy how the least of those Northern barbarians would have burst through the flimsy tangled webs of the older romance!

"Better it is for every man," says Beowulf, "that he avenge his friend, than that he mourn much."<sup>1</sup> One could almost suspect Beowulf of studying the old Grecian tales, so accurately does he strike the point, and emphasize his own superiority.

The plot, or what it will be safer to call the succession of events, in "Beowulf" is too well known to need repetition. The hero's various exploits have little or no connection with one another; they are put together merely as performed by the same man. Critics believe that orig-

<sup>1</sup>Vide "Beowulf," Arnold's edition, 1876, p. 92, line 1384 et seq.

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inally they were narrated as four or more wholly separate songs; and they would certainly read better as that many separate stories.

Other qualities deemed most essential in the modern novel are even less in evidence. Of emotional expression there is practically none. Beowulf is asked to accomplish something, he does it, boasts somewhat childishly of his prowess, and the incident is closed. An exception to this general statement should, however, be made with reference to the episode of Wiglaf in the final dragon fight.<sup>1</sup> A real note of youthful passion may perhaps be found there, with youth's wavering, its rising excitement, and final rush of action. Wiglaf furnishes also the only bit of character study in the whole, and for this reason it has been suggested that this part of the poem may be of later date than the remainder. Beowulf himself is not intentionally differentiated from other men; he is merely the culmination, the ideal of what each of the listeners sought to be, a mighty warrior and sturdy drinker, invincible, without a touch of fear.

Fighting and feasting were the established pleasures of the Teuton, and he felt therefore a joy in hearing of those things. Love had not yet risen on his literary horizon. Hence the details of fighting, and more especially of feasting, supply the "Beowulf" with what to us would be a background against which the emotional story might be displayed. To their own day these details were obviously not background, but valued and indeed essential parts of the tale. How much Beowulf drank and what gifts he

<sup>1</sup>Vide Arnold's "Beowulf," p. 165, line 2599 et seq.

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gained, were matters quite as important as how and whom he fought.

To summarize, then, the development of the elements of the novel as displayed in this the most ancient survival of Teutonic tale-telling, we find:

### Technique in Beowulf

1. *Plot*—not at all conceived as a necessity of the entire conglomeration.

Some of the events, however, have within themselves a vague rising and falling action, difficulties accumulate to a certain point and then are overcome.

2. *Motive*—verisimilitude exists in a barbaric fashion. The impossibilities seem attributable to ignorance as much as design. In a rough way the original bard may merely have woven together the things he told, accepting them as detached facts. There is no proof that this is deliberate fiction. Moral elevation is also shown, though apparently instinctive rather than deliberate. The bard must, consciously or no, have inspired his audience by this picture of an actual heroism such as they themselves might emulate.

3. *Character portrayal*—not conscious, except perhaps in Wiglaf.

4. *Emotional excitement*—certainly not continuous nor insisted on, though perhaps momentarily suggested.

5. *Background*—not intentionally introduced. Each scene is shown for its own value.

6. *Style*—rudely poetic, strong but confused, and with small sense of construction. The singer will sometimes stop in the very midst of a fight, while some hero's family history is fully retailed. Hence for story telling the style is very crude.

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Passing from "Beowulf" to the later mediæval epics, one meets many interesting advances in technique. This progress may be traced to some extent in the Arthurian romances, which, notably in the figure of Launcelot, developed emotion, or in the Charlemagne cycle, where, in the "Song of Roland," we find a plot made fairly consecutive though not of primary importance.<sup>1</sup> But in none of these tales is the advance sufficient to serve as a turning point demanding close inspection. Some of the Northern sagas show, in technique, a much more marked approach toward the novel. The gloom of the Northern mind, its intense feeling of the overmastering power of fate, often lent a striking unity to its tales. Every hero is doomed, his fate has been marked out for him from the beginning. Often this foredoom is announced to him early in the saga of his life. Moreover, there existed a sad sense that man was commonly destroyed by those nearest and dearest to him. Hence the destroyer sometimes goes through the saga a more or less prominent figure by the side of the hero. Here is, in a primitive way, plot. There are causes, interwoven threads and consequences, usually a dramatic consequence. A multitude of disconnected events crowd in between, but never quite destroy the sense of impending catastrophe.

<sup>1</sup>The plot, or rather the story outline, in the "Song of Roland" is made consecutive and mathematically complete, but, if one may use the expression, idly so. I shall dwell later on the idea that a plot deals not only with action but with the increase of emotional interest, and the development of character. The plot of "Roland" has no real connection with the epic's aim. The epic interest centres wholly on the defiant speeches of the bold warriors and the mighty blows they deal in battle. The plot might just as well have been left out.

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“Each of us must  
“The end await  
“Of world’s life.  
“Work, he who can  
“High deeds ere death.”<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps this foreshadowing has its fullest expression in the “Nibelungenlied,” most celebrated of the German epics. The story of this is well known; it tells of the wooing and wedding of Prince Siegfried and the Princess Kriemhild, of the slaying of Siegfried by his wife’s brothers, and of the revenge by which, after many years, Kriemhild wipes out her own race, the race of the murderers. Throughout the tale the tragic end is always kept in view. The first “adventure” contains a forecast of the whole. Men foresee their doom, and approach it with defiant fatalism.

As to the merits of the plot, some of its admirers have been quite enthusiastic. Carlyle says, “Of the Fable, or narrative material of the ‘Nibelungen,’ we should say that it had high, almost the highest, merit; so daintily yet firmly is it put together; with such felicitous selection of the beautiful, the essential, and no less felicitous rejection of whatever was unbeautiful or even extraneous.”<sup>2</sup> Of course he is speaking of the epic here from a poetic rather than a novelistic standpoint. But elsewhere he declares that it “has a basis and organic structure, a beginning, middle, and end; there is one great principle and idea set forth in it, round which all its multifarious parts combine in living union.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Vide “Beowulf,” Arnold’s edition, 1876, p. 92, line 1386 et seq.

<sup>2</sup>Vide “Westminster Review” for 1831, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

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In face of this enthusiasm it is disappointing to find German critics themselves persistent in declaring the "Nibelungenlied" a conglomeration, like the "Beowulf," of many originally separate poems. Following their lines of thought, it would be easy to pick serious flaws in the unity which Carlyle has praised. The first half of the epic deals in rather fragmentary style with the vengeful love of Brunhild for Siegfried. Tricked by him and insulted by her more fortunate rival, she brings about his death and then her own. Only after this does Kriemhild become the pivot of the plot; and even then she is not the centre of interest. Her revenge constitutes really a new tale, a second tragedy above which her hard-handed brothers, strong in death, tower grimly as the ruling figures. To a modern novel, it would certainly be fatal to have the chief hero slain, as is Siegfried, before the middle of the book. Must not the ancient listeners have voiced the criticism so often heard from modern readers of the poem, "I care no more for it, now Siegfried is dead"? Or did the passing of a single individual loom less large to the minds of our ancestors than it does to our own?

As to verisimilitude, the singer of the "Nibelungenlied" insists in almost every stanza that thus has he "heard men tell." The words may be little more than a poetic formula intended to fill out the verse; but evidently the speaker had some desire to be believed, some aim to convince. He pushed magic into the background, using it chiefly for omens, the unheeded warnings of doom. Emotion, both as existent in his characters and as a quality demanded of his readers, is thus kept plainly in view. But only in



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the form of vengeance is it fully recognized as dominating life. The writer's real aim seems to be to approach emotion from the artistic, the poetic side, and convey to his audience the sorrow and tragedy of human existence. He looked thoughtfully and frankly at his characters, talking of them with a clear, simple sense of what they would be likely to do.

Yet their actions hardly seem satisfying; they are "plot-ridden," as *Beowulf* was not. Even Carlyle feels constrained to admit of the singer that "he had little power of delineating character; perhaps he had no decisive vision thereof. His persons are superficially distinguished, and not altogether without generic difference; but the portraiture is imperfectly brought out; there lay no true living original within him."<sup>1</sup> The Germans, seeking to distinguish between the different authors of the different parts, will not dismiss the matter thus as a whole. Scherer condemned several of the songs as worthless, but praised the final or twentieth song as "the most powerful portraiture of action and character produced by Middle High-German heroic poetry."<sup>2</sup>

Technically considered, the difficulty seems to be that the poem found itself vaguely bound to history, or to tradition. The author did not create his own legend. He accepted the older, well-known tales of Siegfried and the other characters. He wove his material together, but he was overladen with it and tried to tell too much, on themes too widely separated, too entirely detached. More-

<sup>1</sup>Vide "Westminster Review" for 1831, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Vide "A History of German Literature," English edition, 1886, Vol. I, p. 112.

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over he was hampered by the fame of his chief figures; he did not venture to change their actions. Siegfried must die, and Kriemhild must avenge. If the author thought, as he sometimes seemed to think, that the impulses actuating his puppets were unnatural or insufficient, he could only fall back on his somewhat monotonous iteration that thus the story had been told to him.

So that a summary of this most famous epic, considered not for itself, but for its tendency toward the novel, would be:

1. *Plot*—strong and clearly marked, with much forewarning, but over-expanded and disjointed in itself, breaking into two tales or more.

2. *Motive*—partly at least to express poetic emotion, sorrow, the tragedy of life. Verisimilitude is seemingly desired, and magic is made subordinate.

3. *Character portrayal*—most of the figures well differentiated, but scarce conceived from the heart, plot-ridden.

4. *Emotional excitement*—strongly emphasized in the form of vengeance, but not employed as the real driving power of the plot. Men are driven on by Fate, not by human feelings or desires.

5. *Background*—filled with details of court life, though some German critics feel that, as with "Beowulf," these details are not background, but the themes and incidents of separate poems.

6. *Style*—of real dignity and considerable poetic worth, though obviously padded in almost childish fashion for the versification.

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Thus far I have sought to emphasize the difference between ancient and modern fiction; but this should not be allowed to conceal the similarity of their advance. In many respects the development of modern fiction has closely paralleled that of Egypt and of Greece.

### **The Mediæval Romances**

Despite the subordination of magic in the "Nibelungenlied," the later tale-telling was to have its period of appeal to the marvellous. The Frenchmen saw to that. Even the fiends and ghouls of the Northland were foes too simple for Amadis of Gaul and Palmerin. The heroes of chivalry must have dragons and magicians, enchanted castles, and armies like the sands of the sea vainly striving to do battle against the might of a single arm. As in Grecian days, the wonders grew and grew, until at last they did overstep the bound of man's almost infinite credulity. Then Cervantes with one push sent them whirling into oblivion.

The love interest, unknown to Beowulf or Grettir, was also rediscovered and gradually became dominant. In the "Song of Roland," in the eleventh century, we are abruptly told that the hero's betrothed, on hearing of his death, fell dead of grief, but otherwise the lady remains unnoted throughout the poem, which dwells on speech-making and battle, man's arts of tongue and hand. In the "Nibelungenlied" both love and friendship hold a larger space, but war and vengeance still remain the dominant passions. A little later Launcelot and Tristram are presented as love's utter slaves, and Tristram dies at its disappointment.

Pursuing yet another parallel, we find the study of

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expression, the delight in words for their own sake, growing through the ages until at last it reached to such ornate and self-satisfied pomposity that even Cervantes could not laugh it out of existence with the other absurdities. It survived in the pastorals, which again, as with Longus, rose from the ruins of the marvel tale. At the opening of the seventeenth century, D'Urfé's "Astrée," with its sententious exaggerations of speech, was the admired tale of the day, the imitated of all imitators.

D'Urfé carries us rather beyond the mediæval period, but a glance at his extravagant school emphasizes the complete change in the method of appeal by which the later romances sought to attract an audience. This change was obviously not in the direction of verisimilitude. Yet it is one of these very court romances, the best of them, "Amadis of Gaul," that Professor Warren has selected as the first modern novel. Let us, therefore, look to this work somewhat carefully to see to what extent it possesses the six essential elements of the craft.

One may read "Amadis" in almost any language, so widely has it been translated. In English we have Southey's artistic rendering, which has the further merit of being very considerably abridged. In the original Spanish the narrative is in prose, and pleasant in style, despite its extravagance. The gallant gentleman, Señor de Montalvo, who recast the tale in its final shape probably about 1470, was a lover of fine words; and the work is almost as much a text-book for courtly speeches and elaborate moral reflections as is the Elizabethan "Euphues." Amadis himself, like Beowulf, is a model

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offered to the auditors, depicting their own ideal of a gallant knight. Hence he is not a studied human character. The same may be said of his lady, Oriana; but in some of the lesser personages of the tale there is real character study, not character development, but thoughtful portrayal of the motives characteristic of the individual.

The so-called plot is admittedly a mere thread on which to hang incident. The book begins with the tale of the father and mother of Amadis, goes on to the hero's birth, and carries him through childhood till he meets Oriana. Thereafter it never quite forgets him or her. Long series of adventures are recounted as happening to other knights; but the narrator always remembers and returns to Amadis at last. Obstacles separate him from his lady; and when he has conquered them all and is on the point of wedding her, a new set of obstacles is introduced, totally unconnected with the last lot. Sometimes not even an obstacle seemed essential to the author. Amadis is merely called on to champion some cause, and so goes a-wandering again. Thus we have really a succession of love romances wholly separate except for referring to the same hero and heroine. Each time that the reader thinks the book must surely end, the author takes a new quill and starts off afresh. Finally a son is born to the lovers; but even after that Montalvo refuses to allow them a full royal wedding ceremony until he has written another book of interruptions. Then they are at last united and dismissed with the blessing of the author and the reader.

In all the love romances of this period there is plenty of emotional excitement, if one can persuade himself to

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believe in the genuineness of the passion expressed in the wordy speeches. And it is because of the union of this love theme with the extremely attenuated thread of plot suggested in the oft-delayed wedding that Professor Warren decides to call "Amadis" a novel. But this standard would admit a dozen older romances, Boccaccio's "Fiametta," Chaucer's "Troilus and Cresside," and even the "Nibelungenlied," unless one bars out the two latter works by the mechanical expedient of declaring that the novel must be in prose, that if the words fall into metre they debar the substance from consideration. In which connection it is worth noting that many of the speeches in "Amadis" itself are rhythmic, as, indeed, they are in all elaborate forms of prose.

Let us then compare "Amadis" with the "Nibelungenlied" a little more closely, as to their possession of the novel's elements. The earlier work I have already summarized, the "Amadis" offers a result about as follows:

### **The Separation of Novel and Romance**

1. *Plot*—wholly indifferent to cumulative force, conceived only as a thin thread of emotion to connect a long string of unrelated incidents and episodes.

2. *Motive*—to express poetic emotion, to portray the ideal. Verisimilitude is wholly abandoned; magic is used at almost every turn, not to astonish, but only to give each errant knight new glories or new sorrows.

3. *Character portrayal*—main figures only types, a few lesser ones effectively outlined.

4. *Emotional excitement*—romantically asserted and much exaggerated, but little understood, unconvincing to modern ears.

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5. *Background*—intentionally filled in with court descriptions, conversations, and author's moral reflections.

6. *Style*—extravagantly elaborate.

Placing these two tables side by side, a fact already suggested becomes more evident, namely, that the romances of the Middle Ages did not approach nearer and nearer to the modern novel, but rather developed away from it along lines of extravagance and exaltation. Somewhere, then, in the dim twilight of those twelfth and thirteenth centuries in which the "Nibelungenlied" took shape, somewhere there, novel and romance began to differentiate. The novel, to be sure, had as yet no distinct existence; its principles were unrecognized or still commingled with those of its more prominent cousin; it had much still to learn from that cousin's career. Yet, since romance was no longer developing toward plot and verisimilitude, we must begin to look elsewhere for other influences which led to the novel; we must supply it with another line of ancestry.

It has become almost a commonplace to say that the novel sprang from a union of the chivalric court romances and the short prose tales of the common people. In these prose tales, however, we find the same lack of unity as in the romance. In the "Gesta Romanorum," the "Hundred Merry Tales," and kindred works, we have collections of short anecdotes, which do indeed go straight enough to the point, with true economy of material. But the moment one of the tales mounts to a thousand words, it begins to wander. As for the longer prose narratives, such as developed around Hamlet and Robert the Devil,

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they are chiefly remarkable for their utter lack of point and direction.

Of course these tales of the people have mainly reached us after repeated revision at the hands of monkish scribes; and it is difficult to say whether their earlier forms may not have been more self-consistent, as they assuredly were less tedious. Take the monkish version of "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungey" as a fair illustration. In the earlier chapters the two heroes do bold and rather roguish feats of magic. Bacon sets a knight riding unwillingly through bog and brier, or fastens a long bladder of pudding to hang from a greedy servant's lips. He captures a town for his king, makes the famous "head of brass," and plans to wall all England round with brass. He is mischievous, but brave and patriotic and honorable. Yet he is not permitted to carry through a single trick without speech-making about it; and in the end he is made to repent the error of his ways, become convinced that even his white magic is wicked, and that the glories he has added to England were not worth while. So he burns his books, moralizes through an entire chapter, shuts himself for years in a lone cell, digs his grave "with his own nayles," and dies "a true Penitent Sinner and Anchorite." As for poor Bungey, the lesser wizard, he is slain outright by the devil, and his body left "breathless and strangely burnt with fire," though it is given "Christian buriall because of his order sake."

So, too, poor Guy of Warwick, slayer of the great dun cow as well as of dragons and other pests innumerable for his lady's sake, is made to see the error of his ways; and, after marrying the fair Phælice, he leaves her, to



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become a pilgrim. On his return from Jerusalem he dwells for years close to his wife, but unknown to her, a venerable hermit, watching her while she mourns incessantly for his sake—a piece of brutality which it is hard to conceive that any race of men could ever have thought holy. One doubts, indeed, if they ever did think so, except theoretically and while the “faire ladye” remained a mere poetic abstraction for life’s pleasure.

Nevertheless, the monkish scribes did one thing for fiction perhaps more important than all their meddling damage. They restored to it what it had not possessed since Egyptian times, a frankly conscious purpose beyond the tale itself. And that purpose was the one that to them seemed the highest. Never a monkish tale, even though it be the madness of Hamlet or the impish pranks of Friar Rush, but ends with its “Here you may see how” some evil strives against some good and meets final and fitting punishment. Stories, the monks resolved, were no longer to be mere tales of pleasure, snares of the evil one, luring men to idleness; on the contrary, they were to become the weapons of righteousness, tricking foolish folks into good, and making sermons popular. Defoe had not forgotten this when he wrote “Colonel Jacque,” nor had Richardson in his “Pamela.”

Even amid all this babble and circumlocution, this falsification of the earlier truth to life, in the interests of a very commendable moral purpose, despite all this, the conception of a story’s central unity was slowly making its way. Boccaccio had the idea, and he seems to be the first modern man who did possess it with any approach to clearness. Several of Boccaccio’s tales of two or three

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thousand words are perfect in this branch of technical art. The celebrated story of Federigo and his falcon is a model of the development and dominance of one idea clearly expressed, self-justified, teaching, and convincing. So is the less-known tale of "Anastasio," or that of "Nathan and Mitridanes." True, when Boccaccio attempts a longer narrative he, too, substitutes variety for unity. Even in the celebrated tale of "Cimon and Iphigenia" this becomes marked in the introduction of Lysimachus, who assumes the leadership of the latter part of the story. Given a single "action," the master handled it with instinctive truth to art; but where he interwove several threads, he was very apt to shift his central thought, to abandon the main action for another.

Mr. Howells, in his "Literature and Life," has some comments on Boccaccio which may be of aid here in explaining this lack of unity. He suggests that the usually acknowledged perfection of these tales is philological rather than artistic, that in both character study and revelation of life they lack depth. "They amuse, but they do not hold the mind and stamp it with large and profound impressions."<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps merely another way of saying that life has deepened since the fourteenth century; and if the criticism points a weakness, it also recognizes a merit in the faithfulness of the stories to their own time. Boccaccio's Florentine contemporaries, we may be sure, did not find his viewpoint superficial.

As to style as shown in mechanical arrangement, the tales of the "Decameron" have a regular formula for opening and closing, which becomes almost negligent in

<sup>1</sup>Vide "Literature and Life," 1902, p. 115.

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its repetition. At a certain time, in a certain place, dwelt a person who lived such and such a life, and now was come to such and such a pass, when—something happens to him and the story is fully on its way. Here is, at least, a clear eye to the necessity of getting preliminaries promptly settled, and a series of causes and effects fairly started. So, too, this series is followed to its end, though often in the author's longer work through wholly detached episodes and ramifications. Background is also supplied in its true subordinate employment of intensifying the "atmosphere" or "motive" of the story. Cimon passes through a beautiful landscape before meeting and being inspired by Iphigenia. No one has ever denied that Boccaccio was a genius. His technique is the best the Middle Ages have to offer.

Or perhaps we should rank with him his English successor, Chaucer, of whose short tales a similar commendation might be uttered. The two masters are much alike in their technique; though with Chaucer the form is apt to be less perfect—poetry naturally digresses from story telling for its own poetic purposes—and the character portrayal covers a broader field, is more easy and natural, more simply true to common human life.

This, then, is what the short mediæval tales seem to offer as an approach to the novel:

**The Approach of  
the Short Tales  
Toward the  
Novel**

1. *Plot*—mere anecdotes lead with well-chosen details straight to a climax. but length still produces diffuseness instead of depth and intensification. A

tale can not be long without being heterogeneous.

2. *Motive*—often, especially with Boccaccio, a real de-

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sire to portray life. The verisimilitude is intuitive and unconscious in the earlier days among the people, preserved by a few master-spirits, but weakening in most tales as they were worked into literary form by monkish scribes. Moral purpose became more important than artistic truth.

3. *Character portrayal*—this rises to a high art with Boccaccio and Chaucer; even character development is sometimes dealt with, though not as a central theme.

4. *Emotional excitement*—given full value. The later stories centre round it, though some of our critics suggest that these writers dealt with shallower human souls and in a more superficial way than modern authors.

5. *Background*—wholly neglected in the earlier narratives, and little dealt with before the *Canterbury Tales*. It assumes with the masters something of its true artistic function.

6. *Style*—the necessary arrangement is understood with a surety apt to drop into careless formula; the wording is "philological perfection."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Vide Howells' "Literature and Life," 1902, p. 116.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MODERN NOVEL

#### **The Period of Transition**

With the culmination of the fiction of the Middle Ages—that is, with the “Amadis” and the “Decameron” or perhaps the “Canterbury Tales”—each of the elements of the novel had been at one time or another artistically conceived, had been carefully studied and consciously employed. Even the novel plot, the clinging to a single movement, the converging of all the threads toward a common end, with accompanying emotional intensity and cumulative power, even this had seemed for a moment almost established in the “Nibelungenlied.” All that remained was that this one element, plot, should be fully recognized, and the others employed not separately, but conjointly, and all combined in a single work.

Again and again was this combination closely approached; but for nearly three centuries it was not wholly reached, its desirability was not fully recognized. From “Amadis” onward there exist a dozen works which by just a little laxity in our requirements might be called, as each of them has been by some thoughtful critic, the first modern novel.

What these seem to lack at first is not only concentration of plot, but, even more, verisimilitude. The successors of Boccaccio and Chaucer did not cling to the masters' clear conception of the high worthiness of truth. Stories,

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not satisfied with presenting this, persisted in being something more than pictures of life. Thus even in Elizabethan England, Sidney's "Arcadia" was romantic and pastoral—that is, extravagant and fantastic, built of many tales instead of one; Lyly's "Euphues" taught rhetoric, and so padded a short story into a volume by the "art of the tongue." Even Robert Greene's simpler narratives wandered and became wholly Euphuistic. Only Nash's "The Unfortunate Traveller" should, according to M. Jusserand, be regarded as a genuine novel.

"The Unfortunate Traveller" is merely the first English example of a form previously developed by the Spaniards, the "picaresque romance."

### Picaresque Fiction

The nation which had already given the world one original literary form in "Amadis of Gaul" and was later to originate "Don Quixote," presented us also with a third creation in "Lazarillo de Tormes." In this work, published in 1554, or in its forgotten predecessors if such once existed, was offered for the first time in modern fiction the detailed narrative of the actual life of a common man, instead of the imaginary existence of ideal knights. How should this lengthy commonplace be made interesting to readers of romance? What excitement could be substituted for victorious battles and ever changing pageantry? The author of Lazarillo solved the problem by making his hero a rogue and detailing all his clever rogueries.

Thus verisimilitude was brought once more to the front. Since the scene was to be placed amid common life, the audience would be shrewd judges of its accuracy. They must be convinced that the hero's rogueries were not only

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clever but really possible, such as might have been played upon the listener himself. This then is what the picaresque romance contributed toward more modern ideas of fiction—a stern necessity laid upon the writer to deal with life exactly as he found it.

But verisimilitude by itself can not constitute a novel; and in other ways the picaresque tale was rather a retrogression from the romance of chivalry. It was less tempted, of course, toward wandering away with heroic strangers newly introduced; and thus it was comparatively short and came nearer to unity of plot. But on the other hand, with the loss of the love interest, the usual form of emotional excitement, it almost ceased to have a plot at all, and tended to become a mere string of incidents again. Even "Gil Blas," the apotheosis of the rogue story, has no real plot interest to connect its skillfully constructed incidents.

Character study and background become much more noteworthy. The return to common life brought with it the depicting of the different ways and moods of common men. "Lazarillo de Tormes" is more valuable than any history, in revealing to us the Spain which Philip II had left behind him. Indeed this bitter outlining of his own times seems often to have been the picaresque writer's real purpose. He is satirist and prophet quite as much as mere tale-teller.

### Technique in Picaresque Fiction

The picaresque romance, then, might be summarized as follows; and it is clear that we must advance yet farther before we find the completed novel:

1. *Plot*—fallen back into a mere string of incidents.

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But these improve in one way on the chivalric romance by being told more often about the same person.

2. *Motive*—seems mainly to present common life, often to protest against its evils. Verisimilitude thus becomes the most important element of all, though in some of the tales critics believe the scenes are much exaggerated because of the satiric purpose of the writer.

3. *Character portrayal*—more fully detailed than ever before, though still external, dealing almost wholly with men's vices and follies, as seen by the eye.

4. *Emotional excitement*—abandoned, perhaps in reaction against its exaggeration in the chivalric romance.

5. *Background*—prominent, sometimes seeming the real subject of the tale.

6. *Style*—usually witty and lively, with a clear conception of how to reach its audience; but sometimes resuming the wandering pomposity of the chivalric romance.

The emotional intensity so completely lacking in the picaresque tales, somewhat reappears in that other Spanish creation, "Don Quixote" (1605).

**Don Quixote** Cervantes' own increasing affection for the Knight of La Mancha leads the creator to make the later adventures of his creature more dignified, more earnest, less of a wild whirlwind of burlesque. He is more imposed on from without, but less ludicrous within. And this gradual deepening and saddening of the tone lends vaguely the effect of unity of purpose and unintended plot. Perhaps we might even go so far as to suggest that we have here the first budding of the "character plot" which aims to become the groundwork of the novel



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of the future, as opposed to the shallower, external, "story plot" of the past. But the character development in "Don Quixote" is very vague, and the book must stand as an isolated burst of genius without precedent or immediate successor. As a story it offers the reader a mere medley of incidents, whose succession and connection seem to have been matter of accident with the writer.

In France the "lighter" reading of the seventeenth century consisted of the voluminous chivalric and pastoral romances, such as the "Diana" of Montemayor. These were fantastic and utterly unreal. Moreover they were quite content to adopt the haphazard formation of their predecessors. In this idle rambling they were encouraged by the revival of the Greek romances, which, from about 1550 onward, were reprinted and for a time won considerable popularity. Even Madame Lafayette, much as she did for the novel, had nothing to offer in improved construction. In reading her first publication, "Zaide," we might easily imagine ourselves back in the days of the Greek tale of Heliodorus, with its love-impelled wanderings in strange lands, its digressions, its intrusions of wholly extraneous tales, and then its feeble shadow of a love plot settled in the end.

Madame Lafayette's "Princess of Cleves" also, though Frenchmen call it the first modern novel,<sup>1</sup> has only a vague and wavering plot. Action scarce exists in it. The scandalous chronicles of the time tell us that the lady was painting her own love affair with La Rochefoucauld.

### The Later Romances

### The Princess of Cleves

<sup>1</sup>Published 1678.

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And since the real event was but a scattered, feeble, and ineffective performance, what can we possibly expect of its paper shadow? The narrative runs constantly into little side anecdotes and sarcasms; it is padded with pictures of the life and personages of the court. The heroine is often forgotten as one reads; the hero wholly so.

The advance made by this work of Madame Lafayette was in character study. The analysis of human feelings and motives is keen and true, and reaches a minuteness unknown before. To say that the author first created the novel by substituting real life for fantasy, is to neglect the picaresque tales. What she did was to bring real life into the story of the court, when it had only previously existed in the stories of the people. In thus applying the "seeing eye" to beings more cultivated and complex, she transferred observation from the exterior to the interior, from action to thought, from the body to the soul. Such plot as her work possesses depends wholly upon emotion, deals with the real "tempests of the heart."

Her story does not, in fact, cling with special closeness to truth of external life. One wearies of hearing that each of the lords is attractive, and each of the ladies beautiful, and that love is the dominant passion of every mind. One doubts if this can be strictly so even in the court of France, and feels that Madame Lafayette is still somewhat under the influence of the extravagant romances from which she broke away. But this is a minor point. All that the "Princess of Cleves" really lacks of being a completed novel is greater concentration of pur-

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pose, the clinging to a single aim, the unity which we have demanded of the novel's plot.<sup>1</sup>

A summary of this famous book would, therefore, stand as follows:

1. *Plot*—a true tracing of cause to consequence, interweaving threads that gather with rising emotion to a climax. But much extraneous matter interrupts and almost destroys the movement of the plot.

2. *Motive*—the expression of the writer's own emotion, the study of her own heart. The verisimilitude thus becomes very marked in contrast to the lack of it in the tale's direct antecedents, though truth is unconsidered in some externals.

3. *Character portrayal*—a minute, searching and much admired analysis of motives and feelings. In the central figure there is even some development of character.

4. *Emotional excitement*—perhaps somewhat shallow, but true and cumulative in effect.

5. *Background*—somewhat too much enlarged.

6. *Style*—cultured and artistic, with a marked change toward simplicity, in contrast to the extravagance of the court romance.

If one places side by side the series of summaries by which I have endeavored to mark a rough path along a somewhat doubtful road, it will be seen that up to this point length had always meant heterogeneousness. A few of the old Sagas of the North did indeed in their sadness and their sternness obtain some degree of

### **The Modern Development of Human Thought**

<sup>1</sup>I am inclined also to insist that the true novel can not deal wholly with such exalted personages as does the "Princess of

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unity; they sought the single, soul-compelling power of gathering tragedy, rather than the change and brightness of comedy,

“As loving ever endeth in sorrow after all.”<sup>1</sup>

But elsewhere in the world, writers of fiction seemed to have small faith in the general reader's persistency, or intensity of interest. They sought to relieve the effort involved in following a lengthy tale. They planned to attract, not to control; to please by parts, not master by a whole. In a word their aim was not for unity, but for variety.

Perhaps this was necessary in an uncultured age, when thought was still slow, education scanty, and long tales were sung or read aloud, and spread over many days. But life was changing and growing deeper; and just that intensifying of the underlying thought was needed to bring order out of mediæval confusion. A mediæval romance had a hundred episodes, each leading the reader down a different path. Under the stimulus of intenser feeling, all these episodes have at length learned to head one way, to be but so many guide posts pointing to the one inevitable end. Unity is stronger than variety; and the recognition of this truth in fiction, the last change necessary to create the modern novel, could not in the world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have been much longer delayed.

Cleves.” Its central figures must be not dukes and princesses but characters from common life, with whose feelings and experiences the reader may be in sympathy, measuring them by his own mind.

<sup>1</sup>Vide Zarncke's edition “*Nibelungenlied*,” p. 363, line 8, “als ie diu liebe leide an dem ende gerne git.”

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It remained naturally for the North, with its steadier earnestness and slower wit, to arouse this final impulse, to give strength of purpose its true dominance over swiftness of fancy, to feel more fully the insistence of a single motive, and teach the world that, despite its length, the novel, the master-novel, must be a unit.

Traces of this teaching may be gathered in the English literature of the seventeenth century, when Mrs.

### **The English Approach to the Modern Novel**

Behn or Aphra Johnson, as she was then called, wrote her "Oroonoko." Compared to more modern novels, this is but a short work, some thirty thousand

words. It has a slight foundation on fact, and tells of Miss Johnson's meeting in the West Indies with Oroonoko, an African negro prince who had been made a slave. It dwells on the heroism and sufferings of Oroonoko, closing with his death and that of his negro wife. It is open to doubt whether Miss Johnson's original purpose in writing was not to show what a fine lady she herself was, of what aristocratic ancestry and poetic sentiments. Yet as she proceeded with her work, the artist sense dominated her, what she had seen or imagined of the horrors of slavery in the Indies preëmpted her soul, pettier passions were swept to the wall, and she painted Oroonoko's sufferings, his rebellion, his tragic death, with a directness and vigor which were new to literature. The reader can not escape; he is in the grasp of genius, a voice "crying in the wilderness"; and when he reaches the end and lays the book aside, it may be with small sense of pleasure, but it is with one single, vivid, unmistakable impression, which no earlier romance could have produced.

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Alas, Miss Johnson had builded better than she knew. Her book was a great success, but she seems not to have comprehended why. She wrote other novels, and plays too, lazy, coarse creations, disconnected episodes of love adventures, with no trace of that flash of earnestness which had made her first effort a unit and a masterpiece.

Other English story writers, male and female, took her worst work as an example, and wrote worse than she. But the genius for unity had arisen in the nation. The path which she had deserted, was open to whoever should stumble on it. John Bunyan wrote his "Pilgrim's Progress" (1678). We may bar this from the catalogue of novels if we choose, and call it an allegory or a sermon. It is certainly not a tale of actual life, its characters are frankly types, not individuals. Dragons do not face us physically in our city streets, nor do giants dwell in caves along our country roads. Yet, if we reject "Pilgrim's Progress" as a novel, we must not lose its literary lesson, that earnestness of purpose, single mindedness, was what the novel needed, was the one thing that could make it other than a bundle of short stories tied together.

"Pilgrim's Progress" is only the story of one man; but every step that man takes is toward a goal. Every sentence within the book helps him to that goal or holds him from it. Not one word is introduced to show the author's skill or wit, or to tell us one fact, however interesting, that does not bear upon the central purpose. And the result is that the ignorant tinker's book will be read forever. Whether men believe his preaching or no, matters

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not; they can not but believe that with all his soul he *meant the thing he said*.<sup>1</sup>

Story tellers did not immediately follow Bunyan's guidance any more than Mrs. Behn's. Probably most of them did not read his work. But the central idea was in the air. Intensity of purpose had produced unity; it would do so again, perhaps in a shape more tasteful to curious palates than an ignorant tinker's sermon, or a blast against the profitable horrors of the slave trade. In France, Prévost's "Manon Lescaut" came very close to this intensity. In England Defoe is clamorous to assure us that he possesses it. Not one of his tales, "Moll Flanders," "Colonel Jacque," even "Roxana" itself, but is replete with passages and weighted with introductions that tell us of the author's earnest moral purpose. He assures us with vows of eager fervor that he writes solely and only to teach us the wickedness of vice, and not with the faintest thought of his rapidly bulging pocket.

This assurance may be partly true. The general demand of the day for stories was flooding London with accounts of highwaymen and other rogues, painted in most attractive colors. Defoe may have honestly planned to counteract these by showing the real wickedness and misery of such courses. But if so, his own vivacity and faithfulness to actual life prevented his books from being quite such convincing sermons as he intended.

<sup>1</sup>Mention ought also be made of Bunyan's "Life and Death of Mr. Badman," which has the same high merit of intensity to lead it toward unity of form. Like "Don Quixote" it contains a plot of character rather than one of action; and while it is scarcely a tale at all, it is most interesting and noteworthy in its presentation of character development.

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His work must therefore be classed with the picaresque tales which it reprobates, and of which "Gil Blas" was the culmination. Defoe tells nothing more than the detached adventures of one person. He does, however, cling closely to that person, tracing the entire life from birth until the moment when in old age the repentant sinner is pictured as sitting down to write.

One other advance should also be credited to Defoe. So strong is his sense of personality, that having striven to become Colonel Jacque or another before taking pen in hand, he never deserts his part until the book is finished. If some one else's story is dragged into the tale, at least the interpolation is not told by its own hero in fashion utterly detached; the narrative is repeated by Colonel Jacque as he heard it, modified by his personality, his views, his interruptions. The reader is never permitted to forget him in any temporary interest in another.

From Defoe the next step is to 1740 and Richardson's "Pamela." No one has ever denied that in "Pamela" we have a completed novel. It possesses each of the essential elements. On the other hand no one comparing "Pamela" with more recent works would assert that it is a completed masterpiece. We have swept far enough away now from Richardson's influence, to admit that his book is mawkish, its sentiment is false, the heroine's honor is but a tradesman's commodity, holding out for the highest market price and then rushing at its bargain. Yet the book can never be pushed from its place of importance as a pioneer. It is histor-



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ically great because its tremendous popularity turned all the world to thinking of novels, to demanding them. It opened the floodgates; and novels good, bad, and indifferent, began the deluge with which they have overflowed the world. "Pamela" revealed a new literary road to popular favor and prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

Why "Pamela's" immediate success? What new thing did it contain? To be sure it appealed strongly to feminine readers; but then many of its successors achieved equal popularity by calling on the other side of the house. It was keen and sure in its character analysis; but so had been the work of Le Sage,<sup>2</sup> and of Madame Lafayette, and Marivaux, or one might suggest Mrs. Manley among English writers.

What "Pamela" had and what the other works lacked, was just this cardinal principle of unity, which, in Richardson's case at least, arose from the real moral elevation and deep religious spirit of the author. His book had all that we have been insisting the novel must possess: a strong and persistent purpose on the writer's part; a real sympathy with and understanding of his fellow beings; a cumulative emotional intensity in the steadily insistent appeal to love, pity and curiosity; and rising from these, a single unified plot whose action begins at the com-

<sup>1</sup>In speaking of "Pamela" it should be emphasized that only the first two volumes are referred to. The two which Richardson afterward added, have no part in the real story and had nothing to do with its success. They were merely a business attempt to trade on the popularity of the book.

<sup>2</sup>In this connection Le Sage's "Asmodeus" should not be forgotten. Its character studies, while quite as keen as those in "Gil Blas," are more fully rounded, more deliberately detached and presented for their own interest.

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mencement and moves onward, never lost, never forgotten, never neglected, until the end is reached.

"Pamela," then, may serve well as the dividing point toward which all earlier fiction had been unconsciously making its long climb, from which all later fiction consciously dates its origin.

### A Review

Having reached the parting of the ways let us look back briefly over the devious and often doubtful road. Such a review may itself be tabulated into a series of results as follows, taking the less intricate matters first.

*Style.*—The method of putting thoughts into language and arranging them in effective form and sequence was very crude in early Egyptian tales, but reached a fairly high development in their later period, and tended to become formulized. The Greeks went through a somewhat similar progress from crudity to a rhetorical perfection which the moderns have not surpassed, except perhaps that both Greeks and Egyptians erred, as enthusiastic students will, in over-elaboration. Greek fiction also tended to become formulized, though rather in ideas than in words. Mediæval fiction began once more at the beginning and rose through the same increasing skill to over-elaboration, almost to formulization in the chivalric romances. Then the pendulum swung back toward simplicity. As early as the fourteenth century, style had reached in the tales of Boccaccio "philological perfection."

*Background.*—This was unconsidered and accidental in Egyptian fiction, but had already become prominent among the Greeks in the earliest of their surviving tales. In Heliodorus there was a glimmering of the true use of

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background, the accentuation of the deeper qualities of the tale; but background became exaggerated among the later Greeks, until they indulged in the wholly extraneous "scene painting" of the Sophists. Early mediæval fiction, in its youthful interest in life, was quite as much interested in scenes as in emotional events, so made a central subject of themes which would now be treated only as background. Gradually the interest in such descriptions waned; they lost place; and it was not until Boccaccio that their true use was established. In the picaresque tales, background assumed a new and perhaps over-prominent aspect, since these were deliberate attempts to picture the various scenes of common life. The pastoral romance also dealt in "scenes," in this case landscapes, unconnected with the tale. Even in the "Princess of Cleves" the details of court life seem to be elaborated for their own sake; and not until we reach "Pamela" does background resume its true subordination to emotion.

*Emotional excitement.*—Passion was scarce existent in Egyptian fiction. It began faintly in the earliest Greek tales. Love gradually became asserted as the master passion, was used at first to string adventures together, then dominated and superseded adventure as the chief theme. The emotional intensity, however, was never persistent and cumulative through the entire tale, except perhaps in Longus, and there not clearly so. Mediæval fiction went through the same course. "Beowulf" shows no emotional excitement in the breasts of its heroes; the "Song of Roland" has a little, but the emotion is still only personal, vainglorious. In the "Nibelungenlied" emotion comes nigh to dominating life. In the tales of Launcelot

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it does so, while Tristram's story is wholly devoted to the sufferings caused by emotion, by the intensity of love. But, as before, the passion was not cumulative, it was roused again and again only to be dismissed for other passion; and then came "Amadis" and such romances, burlesquing love; and then picaresque tales ignoring almost all emotions. Not until the "Princess of Cleves" do we find the persistent, cumulative, emotional intensity characteristic of the modern novel. Not until "Pamela" was this employed in its fullest effect. Here at least, the line of development seems steady, and closely allied with the growth of civilization.

*Character portrayal.*—We can not feel positive that Egyptian fiction ever at any time took thought of personality. Up to the last its characters remain utterly inconsistent. Greek romance painted carefully; it saw with the eye and gave elaborate outward descriptions. Moreover, its old men always acted as old men, its rascals, as rascals. That is, it was true to the type, but with no sense of the individual. The earliest modern fiction was also true to the type, possibly because it was nearer history than fiction, for it soon lost this verisimilitude, and its characters became plot-ridden, like the Egyptian puppets. The short prose tales went back close to life, and Boccaccio and Chaucer give us well studied character pictures. In Boccaccio there is even character development, though perhaps of a rather shallow kind. After that, character study was never wholly neglected. Even the later chivalric romances had something of it; the picaresque tales made it one chief object; Madame Lafayette transferred it from the body to the mind, and introduced

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the minute analysis that Marivaux and then "Pamela" carried to its fullest height. Here, too, therefore, the line of development seems steady, and coincident with the development of man.

*Motive.*—Toward verisimilitude fiction does not seem to offer any steady progress. If one drew any deduction here, it would have to be that while knowledge of the laws of nature and of the human mind advanced with civilization, love of the fantastic and ideal also advanced with at least equal stride. Ten thousand years ago the earnest purpose of the individual tale-teller was just as likely as it is to-day to urge him into telling what he considered truth. There was, however, an increasing scientific recognition of the advantages of at least surface verisimilitude, and of its technical necessity. The Egyptians told always of "strange things" without any thought of Nature's restrictive laws. The early Greeks did the same, but soon found themselves constricted and bound by increasing scientific knowledge. "Beowulf" and the kindred tales of the early Teutons were possibly believed even by the singers themselves. Perhaps the "Nibelungenlied" was also; but, if so, the effort of the singer had become conscious. He distrusted the accounts of magic and pushed them into the background. He could not himself quite understand the actions of his characters, and fell back rather helplessly on asserting that he had been told they did thus and so.

In the extravagant development of mediæval romance, verisimilitude was wholly rejected. It was reasserted in the prose tales of the common people, and grasped in its full value, perhaps with unconscious greatness, by Boc-

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caccio and Chaucer. The monks pushed aside actual truth for the sake of moral purpose. Later this actuality, this harmony with common human experience was insisted on in the picaresque tales, half accepted by Madame Lafayette, and roused to its fullest effect of internal, but not external, truth in "Pilgrim's Progress" and "Oroonoko." In its external aspect, it came to Defoe by English inheritance and also by instinctive genius. Commercially at least it was Defoe who made its value fully understood. In this respect "Pamela" only repeated a lesson already learned.

*Plot.*—The Egyptian writers show no conception of plot or of unity; they seem merely to aim to supply readers with one astounding thing after another. The first Greek tales have the same object; but later with the increasing use of emotion, the increased dealing with man and woman instead of man alone, the story began more and more to look forward toward the lovers' union as a definite goal and conclusion. This, however, was still approached through detached events with no rising intensity, no cumulative effect, except to some slight extent in "Daphnis and Chloe." Then came the degeneracy and extinction of Grecian literature.

Teutonic fiction began again at the beginning. In "Beowulf" it is utterly plotless; but the stern strength of the Teutons forced their sagas rapidly toward a tragic unity which approached close to plot. The chivalric romances of the South drifted farther and farther from this unity, and sought variety instead. The briefer prose tales of the people were naturally units, and Boccaccio and Chaucer extended this unity to tales of a few thou-

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sand words, but these had only a "short story plot" grouped around a single happening, not the "novel plot" which we have described as rising through a series of steps. Longer prose tales became more and more heterogeneous, until Madame Lafayette found perhaps in her own life the force of a single cumulative emotion, and by depicting it in her "Princess of Cleves" came very close to unity of effect. This same deepening of the intensity of emotional life was even more felt in England and produced the ever-increasing current of earnestness which swept fiction on from "Oroonoko" and "Pilgrim's Progress," to "Robinson Crusoe," and at last to "Pamela."

Thus we seem to reach one clear and not wholly invaluable conclusion, that the main power and worth of the modern novel, its difference from former fiction, its superiority, lies in its unity. This unity was born from the deepening of human emotion and finds expression in the plot—indeed it creates the plot whether of character or incident—and unity of plot can arise only from clear vision and unshifting purpose in the author's mind. It is his earnestness, his underlying honesty to himself and to life, which makes his novel "worth while." The thought leads us back once more to Stevenson, the latest master; and one reads with ever increasing appreciation his intuitive grasp upon it all when, in that passage already quoted, he bids the novelist "Choose a motive, whether of character or of passion; carefully construct his plot so that every incident is an illustration of the motive, and every property employed shall bear to it a near relation of congruity or contrast; . . . and allow neither himself in the narrative, nor any character in the course of the di-

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alogue, to utter one sentence that is not part and parcel of the business of the story or the discussion of the problem involved. . . . And as the root of the whole matter, let him bear in mind that his novel is not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude, but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity."



PART II  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE  
MODERN NOVEL



## CHAPTER I

### THE RECENT STUDY OF STORY BUILDING

#### **Aim of the Ensuing Chapters**

The earlier portion of this work lay over ground infrequently discussed, not often examined except by curious students of the past. Through this historical review I have attempted to discover what the essential elements of the novel are, and how and when these first found recognition among writers and acceptance among readers. The purpose of the remaining portion is to trace the development of technique in the novel since the latter has been a popularly established form.

For this portion of the work the books of reference, the critical studies, and the all-important "raw materials," the novels themselves, become as numerous and easily accessible as, for the earlier portion, they were rare and scattered. Indeed these later chapters might almost have been constructed by an elaborate gathering of quotations, dovetailing them together. There have been few novelists who have not, either by letter or preface, or even more often by interpolated comment in their tales, told us their own estimate of their work and of the principles of their art. The literary critics also have given the subject much attention. They have gone butterfly-hunting through all this region of the modern novel's technique, rambling at pleasure; or they have scooted through it in automobiles, just touching the high spots along the road in

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order to reach some pleasant grove, wherein they spread a charming luncheon for any accompanying friend.

Indeed the most serious objection to thus writing by quotation would be that I should prove too much. The butterfly hunter is by nature an enthusiast, else he would not take up the chase; and the beautiful butterflies he himself has captured, naturally please him more than other people's "stupid bugs." Of the various essentials whose early history we have been tracing, not one but has its advocates, who have earnestly assured us that it is the chief factor not only in the novel's construction but in its success, either artistic or pecuniary. As for the automobiling critics, most of them have doubtless made careful preliminary exploration of the novel's country before escorting a friend to their pleasant luncheons; but these closer studies they have not mapped out for us. The amateur who ventures into the land has still to stumble through it as best he may, following the devious tracks of the entomologists or seizing eagerly upon such luncheon remnants as have been left behind.

Be it ours now to plod across the land prosaically and methodically, to examine each field of its technique, and leave the region roughly charted and measured for future visitors. To one who thus seeks only to establish the known, and separate it from the chaos of the unknown, the enthusiasm of previous explorers and of present-day prophets proclaiming the glorious prospects of the land, may seem a bit bewildering. He must sternly refuse to be carried away by each or all of their exclamatory explosions. Bold prospector, you may indeed have found a gold mine out yonder in the mists; yet we will not lay

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down our measuring tools for your halloo. Our less spectacular essay is still to map out this field immediately at hand—which may prove better farm land in the end.

Whether then we begin the modern novel with the saintly Pamela or with some autobiographical scamp of Defoe's, with the aristocratic Princess of Cleves or the miserable little beggar Lazarillo and his successors, the point of starting need make little difference so

long as we can somewhat positively agree as to our destination and our means of reaching it. Lazarillo and Madame Lafayette are almost equally forgotten. "Robinson Crusoe" is chiefly known through some abridgment for children, one syllabled words in large sized type with highly colored pictures in red and yellow. "Pamela" has long since ceased to hold an audience; it has been relegated to the shelves of scholars. The best of these early efforts shows poorly in comparison with later works; yet even the worst of them has much to teach us, much of value to be noted and treasured by the man who would understand the successful novel of to-day.

In the study of these works, it will no longer be convenient to advance chronologically and by tables, examining each notable work from every side. There have been such multitudes of novels, and the progress manifest in most of them has been so slight, that such a discussion would become voluminously lost in its own involution, and instead of advancing would seem to gyrate in endless repetitions. Hence it becomes necessary, in the following chapters, to take up separately the various elements, the development of which I have previously followed in com-

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bination. Having seen them all unite to form the novel, let us now watch them individually, to see what the novel has done with each.

I shall assume in the reader what it would have been unfair to assume before, a general knowledge of the literary history on which we touch. It has been fully told: the sudden awakening of the world of 1740 to the interest and value of the novel, the deification of "Pamela" and its pudgy little author, the reaction from Richardson's pathos to the sturdier tone of Fielding, the rush of hundreds of writers into the new field both in England and abroad, and the consequent confusion and misconceptions of the novel form. Experimenters soon discovered just how silly and ignorant a novel might become, and yet be devoured by a public grown suddenly omnivorous. An autobiographical turn was given to the new fiction by Smollett. A thousand deficiencies of art crept into the easy form, and within twenty years of its creation the novel sank into shapeless chaos, into days of a multitudinous hackwork more uncultured than our own.

Meanwhile, the milder, sounder art of Goldsmith, almost lost in England amid the torrent of books, had been vastly influential in molding foreign, especially German, thought; and for a time at least the novel was of greater import abroad than in the home of its first success. Goethe, admitting himself a pupil of Goldsmith, spread his art in Germany. Musaeus, Wieland, and at length the Titanic and chaotic Richter employed the new form as a vehicle for self-expression. The romanticists, Tieck,

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Novalis, Hoffmann, made use of it for fairy tales. In France Voltaire and Rousseau both seized upon the novel as a pulpit from which to preach of truth, of tolerance, or of sentiment. Thus misunderstood, misused, employed as a mere outward garb in which to clothe soliloquies and sermons, poetry and preachment, the novel, driven far from its legitimate vocation, sank to depths of formlessness and incoherence wherein almost it perished.

It was rescued in its native land. There came to its aid a delicate, feminine intuition, a womanly healing, helping, and guiding. This potent influence developed from the simple frankness of Miss Burney, to the tremendous moral energy of Maria Edgeworth, and the consummate artistic instinct of Jane Austen. Standing on the scaffolding built by these, came poor, harassed Scott with his prodigal genius, uplifting a world of literature upon his shoulders even as he did a world of financial disaster, and by sheer, blind strength raising the novelist's art again into dignity and world-wide recognition. Once more the "English" novel was everywhere the vogue, and Scott's followers were legion. Victor Hugo and Dumas in France, Manzoni and Grossi in Italy, and at a later period the great Russian writers, Gogol, Turgenev, and Tolstoi, received their initial impulse from England.

In the native home of the new fiction the successors of Scott copied his faults rather than his excellences, until Dickens came with his passionate love of humanity, his intense insight and almost hysterical sympathy to lift us to a higher plane. Then arose Thackeray equally tender, but calmer, stronger, more self-controlled, to teach the novel its true high attitude toward life. In France, Bal-

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zac taught breadth of view, George Sand blended poetry with passion, Mérimée, Gautier and a dozen more wrought music into language. In America, Hawthorne gave perfection to form, and sought the inmost soul of character.

Under such masters as these the novel ceased to be a national creation; it became international, universal. No longer subject in its development to the chance of some popular success, or to the whim of any individual intellect, however great, the novel was become a fully established and assured artistic form. The main principles of its technique were recognized. In later days writers and critics have broken into schools discussing and upholding this or that special issue in the art, preaching realism after the fashion of Flaubert, or objectivity with Maupassant, delving in subtlest analysis with James, or prying into every mud puddle with Zola, insisting on primal facts with Tolstoi, or pleading for romance with Stevenson. But all these special pleas have been on problems intricate or personal; the broader principles, the essential elements, seem generally accepted, if somewhat vaguely understood.

There is, however, one point of divergence between the schools, which any technical discussion must encounter so frequently, that we had best face it at once, before proceeding to individual examinations. There are two sharply differing reasons why novels are so widely read, two values they possess. A reader may turn to them either for amusement or for study, either for relaxation from the sterner affairs of life, or for

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knowledge of these same affairs, a wider, deeper knowledge than one's narrow personal experience can offer. Doubtless the amusement, the relaxation, is the dominant attraction which draws eighty out of every hundred who pick up a novel. Perhaps the percentage could be put much higher. Yet even the most frivolous of the readers of Stevenson has some sense of the value of the thought and poetry presented; and on the other hand, the most sternly scientific student of Zola can not wholly ignore the pleasure of his toil. Both of these objects therefore the novel must achieve, and if one serve as the lure to reading, the other is advanced as the excuse.

The critic of the novel must recognize this twofold necessity. It is easy for extremists to rush off on either side, the one rejecting with scorn the tale that ventures to instruct, the other turning with equal contempt from any analysis that stoops so low as to amuse. The critic must stand manfully to his guns; he must hold soberly to the median truth; he must insist on both results. If all the light and interest be left out, if one must plod painfully through a book, forcing himself each day to accomplish just so much of an allotted task, that book is not a novel but an inferior work of science. If on the other hand one gathers from a story only false and misleading impressions of existence, only evil thoughts and worse desires, then indeed "Our Adonais has drunk poison!" The book is not a novel but a lie. Personally, I have never had the misfortune to read any pretended "story" so flatly and wholly mendacious that I should care to offer it as an example of this latter class; nor one so utterly lifeless as to illustrate the former. The disputants on the subject

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have been mutually less forbearing in expression; but we may leave these extremists of controversy to vituperate one another. The public is certain to persist in its demand that its novels shall have both value and interest.

Since the writing as well as the reading of novels has become so widely spread, their analysis must pass at times from one school of writers to another, from England to America, to France and other lands. One must follow the general changes, the broad improvements in technique, which have been made in every clime. If, so far as possible, I draw my illustrations from English-speaking sources, it is chiefly to escape the deadening influence of translation, and to appeal to the reader in his native tongue.

One other caution I should like to emphasize. The question of technique is not the only one with which the novel is concerned. There is a power of genius, of mastery over human thought, of fire and poetry and splendor, which far transcends technique. There have been true masterworks of fiction that abounded in errors of form; and one can conceive the possibility, though scarce the probability, that a technically perfect novel might still be a cold and tedious one. This caution does not, however, contradict my opening proposition that the question of technique is of the first importance, and that a clear understanding of it must vastly increase the pleasure of reading and the chances of success in writing.

The present work attempts nothing beyond a broad study of this technique. It makes no effort to consider those rules of rhetoric that apply equally to all forms of

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narrative. Neither does it consider the relation of the novel to other forms. It is not a history of the novel, but specifically an analysis of its elements. A little history appears, but only because these elements can perhaps be most readily understood by considering each of them in its actual employment, following it through some roughly chronological sequence.

## CHAPTER II

### PLOT

**The  
Importance of  
Plot**

“The plot’s the thing.” Of this we are positively assured by more critics than we need to count. Perhaps in discussing the predecessors of the novel, and pointing out the slow struggle into life of that deepening consciousness of unity which finally made “plot,” I also may have come very near to asserting the supremacy of this particular essential. Such an assertion, however, would have resulted from viewing plot in that higher sense which I have suggested, as “the road of a soul.” Ordinarily the word is accepted in a lighter way as meaning merely the external plot, the “story,” any continued sequence of events leading to a result. Hence it may be well to seek the views of the subject expressed by a few standard writers.

A review of the definitions of the novel presented in the earlier chapters will emphasize the general insistence on the importance of the “story.” Or we might hearken to Brander Matthews, who in his essays on the art of fiction declares, “Nothing should be allowed which does not carry on the story.” Among novelists themselves there is Marion Crawford, who in a recent little monograph calls the novel a “pocket-play,” and says: “The means, all subservient to language, are many, but the object is always one: to make the reader realize as far as possible the writer’s conception of his story.”

An authority perhaps even higher, considering that he

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was knighted as England's representative prose author, is Sir Walter Besant. In a lecture on the "Art of Fiction" he speaks of "the most important point of all—the story," and adds: "There is a school which pretends that there is no need for a story: all the stories, they say, have been told already; there is no more room for invention; nobody wants any longer to listen to a story. . . . It is, indeed, if we think of it, a most strange and wonderful theory, that we should continue to care for Fiction and cease to care for the story. We have all along been training ourselves how to tell the story, and here is this new school which steps in, like the needy knife-grinder, to explain that there is no story left at all to tell. Why, the story is everything. I can not conceive of a world going on at all without stories, and those strong ones, with incident in them, and merriment and pathos, laughter and tears, and the excitement of wondering what will happen next. Fortunately, these new theorists contradict themselves, because they find it impossible to write a novel which shall not contain a story, although it may be but a puny bantling."

I have quoted Mr. Besant thus much at length because even in his energy he implies that this point of plot supremacy is not wholly conceded. Opposed to his view stand such notable critics as M. Zola, who has expressed his opinion that the novelist of the future will ignore the story wholly, will "take any chance event whatever," and devote himself wholly to elaborating "pictures of life"; or there is Mr. Howells, who recently made in print the somewhat startling announcement that he had read none of Stevenson's novels and did not intend to, as

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he understood they were wholly "novels of adventure"—that is, stories.

Since the question is thus declared an open one, our only course here must be to follow the use of plot in the novels themselves, its employment and development since "Pamela." By learning what has been done and with what effect, we can gain some idea of underlying values.

"Pamela," as has been pointed out, has a clearly marked and sustained, though simple, plot. The heroine is threatened with ruin not only from outside attack, but from the rising tide of her own emotions. The question of her fate is the only one presented; it cries out to the reader from every page of the long book with ever-deepening uncertainty, until his anxiety is at last relieved, with the heroine's, in the rather stiff and conventional triumph of her marriage. This is the real ending of the book; but later the author added another part equal to the first in length, a string of scenes very slightly connected, depicting Pamela's trials while securing acceptance in "society." It would seem, then, that the strength of plot in the original tale was at least to some extent accidental, and that its value was unrecognized by Richardson himself.

Nevertheless, his second and greatest novel, "Clarissa Harlowe," has the same intensity of plot; in fact, the same plot itself, though sketched upon a larger field. In "Pamela" we have simplicity; the letter-writing heroine is the only figure clearly drawn. If to her we add her master, and the rather shadowy curate Williams, with perhaps the still more shadowy Mrs. Jukes, we have

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named the only four people who are anything but supernumeraries in the tale. In "Clarissa," on the contrary, there are fully characterized some fifteen people, each of whom takes an active part in forwarding the tale; and in addition there are some fifteen more, such as the brothel keeper and the undertaker, who, while left in outline as empty types, are at least as important as Mrs. Jukes in "Pamela." Minor figures, servants, friends, citizens, peasants, appear in crowds. The reader moves, therefore, in a much broader world, one wherein an earlier writer like Defoe would surely have gone a-wandering, plotless, drifting from chance to chance. Yet Richardson never for a moment loses his course. If his adherence to his plot be a mere instinct, it is all the more marvellous for that. And the plot is as simple, as narrow, as it is strong.

A young woman of finest instincts is pressed forward by a dozen different causes and influences into a rash elopement. Struggling, in a far nobler spirit than silly Pamela, against what in the novelist's hands becomes an inexorable fate, she is at length ruined by force. The tale takes four leisurely volumes to reach to this, its climax; yet even from the very beginning the goal was steadily in view and drawing nearer with every word. The climax reached, then with the same stately slowness of irresistible fate, the same magnificent confidence in himself and in his theme, the author unfolds the consequence, and through four further volumes Clarissa arranges her affairs and dies. The technical perfection of dramatic construction in "Clarissa Harlowe" is one of the most notable points in early fiction.

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When one reads the accounts of how Richardson's two tales were received in their own day as they came out part by part, of the weeping groups that gathered round the author and besought him not to let Clarissa die, he realizes that plot was a large, I think the largest, element in their success. Clarissa's character was indeed much admired by the public; but it was not her character which was at stake through those last four volumes, it was her fate, her "story."

Of course we peruse these tales with other eyes to-day. Their long-drawn agony and suspense are more than the modern, or at least the American, spirit will endure. I have offered these volumes for reading to class after class of college students, and I have yet to find a young man who did not skim through the latter part of the story, passing over ever larger and larger gaps until he reached the end. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that they all do reach and read that end. In other words, it is not indifference that hampers their reading, but impatience. Richardson is not too dull, but only too deliberate for modern taste.

This impression that our earliest novelist reached his two great successes unwittingly, deepens when one turns to his third and last story, "Sir Charles Grandison." Here he had no longer the one dominant idea, the one intent, which makes for unity. In "Pamela" he started to portray a simple girl resisting temptation; in "Clarissa," a young lady rising superior to disaster. In "Grandison" he aimed only to display an ideal gentleman. Note the distinction. In each of the earlier efforts there was a character and a struggle; that is, as we demanded at the beginning, the man plus the movement, a story, an emo-



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tion. In the last there was only a character. Grandison might do what he would. Being thus unconstrained, or let us say unguided, by a predetermined plot, an *idée fixe*, Richardson attempted a yet wider scene, he brought in more characters. As a result he wandered in uncertainty. In Grandison it is chance, not fate, that ushers in each new event. The hero has the game entirely in his own hands, and we feel no anxiety for him. We do not ask breathlessly what happened next; we soon cease to care. The novel was a failure. To say that this was because of its feebleness of vacillating plot, is to assert what is now impossible of proof; but the fact remains that this novel, intended by Richardson to be his masterpiece, was upheld, even in its own day, only by the tremendous reputation of the author. To-day it has become almost unreadable. I know no more tedious literary task imposed upon the unhappy critic than that of reading through the endless inanities and ecstasies which fill the eight volumes of "Grandison."

If Richardson was the unconscious artist made great by a dominating idea, Fielding on the other hand was the deliberate student, always planning, measuring and analyzing his effects. Fielding came to his work as a novelist with a special technical training which his rival lacked. He was a university gentleman, and therefore had some pretence to taste. He was a lawyer and professional wit, and therefore not likely to be betrayed into mawkish sentiment. He was a tried and fairly successful dramatist, skilled therefore in the construction of the literary form that comes closest to the novel.

### Fielding's Use of the Comedy Drama Plot

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Considering the supreme importance which plot holds in the drama, it is rather surprising that Fielding's submission to its guidance in his novels is not even more pronounced. He began the first of these in heedless holiday mood. He started "Joseph Andrews" solely to ridicule "Pamela"; and at first he seems to have conceived it simply as a string of burlesque incidents ridiculing the sore tried modesty and virtue of his Joseph. The power that seized upon the author and gave worth to this flimsy design, was his love of his own figures as they grew beneath his hand. Parson Adams is the book. The characters, the scenes, the incidents, and the author's keen and bitter comment upon these as they pass, make up its value. Its plot never reaches beyond the rudimentary stage.

Was it because of this that "Joseph Andrews" never won the popular success that "Pamela" did? Though its knowledge of human life is ten times as wide, its philosophy of life ten times as high, it was not in its own day, perhaps it is not to-day, considered so great or so enthralling a book. It was the author's plaything, uninspired by his deeper self, a mere preliminary to his greater work.

In "Tom Jones" on the contrary Fielding set himself down deliberately to study this new form of fiction, and use it to present his view of life. He wanted to protest against the formal morality of Richardson and Richardson's school. He wanted to expose cant and hypocrisy, to exalt the spirit above the letter of the law, to insist that what a man is and feels, shall be taken into our estimate of the man, rather than what he says and does, rather than sententious action with perhaps treacher-

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ous motive. In "Tom Jones," then, we have the fully planned and preconsidered work of a master. In the first chapter of each "book" the author pauses to discuss his art, to explain its principles and point out their application to his work. This in itself is of course a distraction from the tale; but it shows its earnestness, its careful study. Putting these introductory chapters aside, as I suppose nine out of every ten readers do put them aside, unread, the book has a well built, well connected plot. I say "built" because we have here an obviously arranged and constructed edifice, not the natural sweeping onward like a river which is so characteristic of Richardson's masterpieces.

Fielding's knowledge of the drama has even led him to the use of "intrigue" and "surprise," things unthinkable to Richardson's simplicity. That is to say, there is a secret, the existence of which is announced at the beginning. Tom Jones is presented as a foundling babe. His parentage is kept from the reader; but much is told of the circumstances surrounding his discovery, and hints as to his true birth are scattered in every chapter. The challenge is thus deliberately held forth that the reader shall exercise his ingenuity to guess the answer to the riddle. Curiosity is roused.

Then comes the trickery by which Tom is deliberately driven from his home, deprived of his fortune and his love; and we set out with him sympathetically, as his avowed champions, to discover his parentage, rout his enemies, and win his sweetheart. Here are many threads of interest deliberately offered us, where Richardson gave only one. Following the ravelled skein we find, not as in

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"Clarissa Harlowe" a rising intensity, a climax of fate and passion, followed by a falling action of equal length ending in the catastrophe, we find instead a series of difficulties accumulating around Tom and his lady, partly through their own follies and weaknesses, partly through the obstinacy or treachery of others. Secrets multiply until the final act—the terms of the drama come naturally here, for the methods are obviously borrowed from the comic stage—when the machinations of the villain break down rather feebly and unexpectedly, trick after trick is laid bare, complexity after complexity unravelled, and we reach what has become the conventional novel end, the secret solved, the villains foiled, and the wedding for a final chapter.

"Tom Jones" is a masterpiece; but I am not aiming here to reassert its unquestioned greatness. I am examining it solely on the subject of plot; and in that respect the lavish praise showered on the book has misled many an amateur. It is true that Coleridge went back to antiquity to group this plot with classic models as being one of the three perfect ones; and some later critics have echoed Coleridge's phrase. But I can only understand them as meaning a sort of handbox perfection. The prestidigitateur whirls a surprising number of bulky articles out of a box. It seems astounding that so much matter was contained within, and quite impossible that all of it should ever be restored again. But, presto! The magician waves his wand, and back the heterogeneous mass all tumbles into place. Every article fits in. Not one is crowded out, not a loose end left dangling anywhere. Examine it for yourselves, gentlemen; admire.

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Marvellous! Yet, after all, this is only a trickster's perfection, the triumph of a mathematician and a wit. There is no great artistry in this. I am not sure that there is even any very absorbing interest. In brief, the plot, the story of "Tom Jones," while mechanically perfect, is trivial and external, hinging upon the accidents and coincidences of life, not upon its deeper causes and consequences. One is recalled constantly to Professor Brander Matthews' keen comment, that the art of fiction, dealing first with the impossible, progressed through the improbable to the probable, and then to the inevitable. "Tom Jones" still deals with the improbable.

Yet another noteworthy point in our investigation of this celebrated work is its treatment of episode. During Tom's journey to London there are several adventures introduced that have very little connection with either the hero or the plot, and once at least the tale stops flatly and frankly while Tom listens through chapters to the life history of a chance recluse. Moreover, Fielding takes up this handling of his matter for discussion, and insists on the necessity of "episode," to relieve the strain of the reader's attention to the longer tale.

This doctrine in its baldest form has wholly vanished out of fiction. It is unthinkable that a tale-teller of to-day should interrupt himself, "But, gentlemen, I fear I bore you, or I sadden you. Let me tell you a different story. . . . And now, your minds being at rest again, let me resume the story which we rejected before. Kindly turn back three chapters and see where we were."

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This is, I say, unthinkable. But in a less obtrusive form episode still preserves its place in many novels. The characters of the tale are not deserted, but are used in scenes which, while failing to advance the central story, emphasize some other aim deemed essential by the writer.

On the stage of course the episode is more often wholly extraneous. There its purpose is distinctly to break too extreme a tension, to give us lights by which to gauge the shadows. But the conditions of the drama, if I must insist on it again, demand a different technique. When the reader of a novel wearies of its strain he can, he does, lay the book aside, and seek relief in some outer distraction. The play must be taken at a single sitting, and hence must supply its own relief. Moreover the actual sight of the characters on the stage so intensifies our sense of their emotions, their dangers, that we may well need relief. On the other hand the vagueness of the novelist's hold upon his unseen reader, enfeebled by the constant interruption of the reading for the affairs of life, makes it almost impossible to create sufficient intensity of impression. A novelist to-day may snap the thread of interest by accident, mistaking its true course; but no practised writer dreams of deliberately ignoring or neglecting the deeps he may have stirred, of uniting with the forces of disunion and adding himself to the interrupters of his tale.

The matter is summarized by the novelist Trollope in his *Autobiography*. He says, "There should be no episodes in a novel. Every sentence, every word, through all those pages, should tend to the telling of the story."

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Such episodes distract the attention of the reader, and always do so disagreeably. Who has not felt this to be the case, even with 'The Curious Impertinent' [in "Don Quixote"] and with the 'History of the Man of the Hill' [in "Tom Jones"]? And if it be so with Cervantes and Fielding, who can hope to succeed? Though the novel which you have to write must be long, let it be all one. And this exclusion of episodes should be carried down into the smallest details." Returning therefore to our first idea, Fielding's plot construction is that of the dramatist, the comic dramatist, and in so far as the technique of the novel differs from that of the comic drama, in so far Fielding fails.

Smollett, most noted of the immediate followers of Richardson and Fielding, gave less of value to plot than did either of them. In this he harks backward to Defoe. Each of his early tales traces the life of a man, carries a wandering hero through many scenes and detached adventures. Indeed Smollett's first successful novel was almost wholly autobiographic. Some idea of continuity, however, he had gathered from his more recent models. He has always a heroine, and a love affair which, once it is started, drags on to the end of the wandering tale; and he closes with the hero's marriage, not, as did Defoe, with old age and repentance.

Far more important in the development of plot was the work of those greater writers, Johnson and Goldsmith. Each of these literary leaders of the day, in the course of his multifarious labors, produced a single novel; and

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each of these books, despite its hurried and careless manufacture, displays some instinctive appreciation of the necessities of technique. Johnson's "Rasselas," we are told, was struck off at white heat, in great haste under stress of a single impulse. As usual, unity of purpose has here produced unity of plot. The writer meant to portray a man, in possession of all that makes for physical happiness, rejecting these things in a search for mental happiness, and learning through repeated disappointments that this nobler form is not to be found on earth, that we must look higher.

It is a pity that the good doctor's ponderous verbosity has relegated this tale almost wholly to the libraries of students. There is no doubt that the ordinary reader would enjoy, and he certainly would profit much by, a revival of the classic work—if only he did not fall asleep over its magniloquent but perissological otiosity.

In Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield" we face a wholly different style and thought, yet here also there is unity of plot. The idea of the story looks back to Richardson. Goldsmith planned to take not a good girl but a good man, to heap upon him every increasing suffering, and have him rise superior to all, until the last and worst calamity showed him only nobler than the petty trials of the early chapters. This is what may technically be called a "character plot," a form which has here become much more subjective, more dependent on internal emotions than it is with Richardson. In "Pamela," which might also by a straining of words be said to have a character plot, our interest centres almost wholly around the objective, the external result. Will Pamela escape?



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Will she triumph, or will she fall? So even in "Clarissa," much more important as the subjective becomes, the main anxiety of readers is still, will she be ruined or saved? And after that, will she die or live? In the "Vicar" it is the progress of the man himself that holds us, not the rather mechanical series of events by which he suffers. In fact this mechanical series of events has been always felt to be unconvincing; and we know how Goldsmith himself breaks impatiently through it at the end, and uses the most improbable tricks of the stage to rescue the Vicar from all the apparently irretrievable disaster. Thus Goldsmith's one novel possesses an external plot which is quite as elaborate in its intricacy, and sudden and improbable in its trickery, as that of "Tom Jones"; and it is even less convincing. But it possesses also an internal plot far more important and more true, which dominates the whole. Some critics have thought they saw such a character plot also existent in "Tom Jones"; but if so it is certainly not dominant. On the contrary it is wavering, feeble, and often wholly forgotten in the exploitation of other "pictures of life."

Through the lesser novels of this first period I have searched carefully in hopes to find others which I might place beside those of Richardson, Fielding, Johnson, and Goldsmith in their power of plot, their conception of this idea of unity. I have found not one. Adventure, incident, is still the theme as with Defoe. To whom these adventures happen, or what their consequence, their connection one with another, remains a minor matter. In France those two mighty geniuses, Voltaire and Rous-

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seau, both employed the popular novel-form; but the "Zadig" and "Candide" of the one and the "New Heloise" and "Emile" of the other are really philosophic treatises concerned wholly with argument and the enforcement of the writer's views. They are called novels only for want of a better name. In fact Voltaire himself spoke with utmost contempt of the novel as "the work of folk writing easily things unworthy to be read by serious minds."

In Germany also, the earlier attempts at the novel by Wieland, Musaeus and others, are far inferior in technique to those of the English masters. It is only with Goethe that the German novel rose to notable artistic form. The "Sorrows of Werther" was written, as Goethe himself tells us, under Goldsmith's influence. It in turn became a mighty influence, over all Europe. Here also, as in the English masters, we find unity of plot. Werther, the hero, is attracted toward a young lady who is already devoted to another. Werther's hopeless passion gradually deepens until he has not the power, scarcely even a wish, to struggle against it. Dejection slowly masters him and leads at length to suicide, deliberately planned. This supplies a powerful plot, which is kept for every moment in mind. Moreover, it is a subjective plot, dealing not with action but with feeling, with the progress of an emotion. In this persistent dominance of the tale by a single idea, the "Sorrows of Werther" compares with the best work of Richardson.

Goethe's later novel, "Elective Affinities," contains an equally positive and clearly handled plot sketched with more characters and on a broader canvass; but in his

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much greater and more fully elaborated work, "Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship," plot sinks to be a minor matter. At least this is true of the outward, the visual plot. Meister wanders idly through many adventures; and while the work attempts to show the hero's gradual broadening of mind and acceptance of the lessons of life, yet this study is so broken in upon, so wholly forgotten by the reader during many pages of philosophizing about all things in heaven and earth, that no man ever yet read "Wilhelm Meister" for the story. It is only after laying it down that he says—or may say if he has thought earnestly the while—"I see how Meister epitomizes us all. I see how we do, we must, pass from enthusiasm and rebellion to an attitude of chastened submission and even approval toward the universe."

Long before as a matter of chronology we reach the later novels of Goethe, there had developed in England

### **External Plot in the Later Eighteenth Cen- tury Novels**

a new form of fiction in which the external plot resumed its importance. This was the novel of mystery. It began with Walpole's "Castle of Otranto." Recurring to the methods of an earlier age,

Walpole, as he explained in the preface of his tale, sought deliberately to appeal to wonder; so he introduced the supernatural into ordinary life. His wonders seem puerile to us now; I can never quite escape the suspicion that they were intentionally burlesque, as where, for instance, in a tragic moment three supernatural drops of blood fall from the nose of a statue. But at least the tale was taken seriously in its own day, had a wide success, and started a school. Here then is

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a new form; and, like the earlier successes, it has its plot clearly marked. The villain, Manfred, acquires a baronial estate by bloody crimes; the ghostly ancestors of the excluded heir take up the cause of their family and, after inflicting endless supernatural visitations upon the followers of Manfred, and involving his innocent daughters in the general discomfort, they finally bring about Manfred's death and the restoration of the legitimate baronial race in the person of the lover of one of the daughters.

If the modern reader calls this childish, there are few of us who would dispute with him; but at least it gives a clearly outlined and consecutive story. Nay, it is almost, as one critic has remarked, a detective story; and it develops its dénouement with something of a detective's cleverness. Unfortunately, if the tale is regarded in this light, our rebellious sympathies are in danger of turning to Manfred. The game against him is unfairly played. Surely in a detective story at least, one can demand that when the brains are out the man shall die, "and there an end" to him. Macbeth's hysteric outcry is in "Otranto" brought up for practical argument and protest.

Most popular of the followers of Walpole in the use of mystery was Mrs. Radcliffe. Each of her novels has a fully developed external plot. The almost superhuman villain seeks to destroy the equally superhuman heroine; and she escapes him only after going through a series of excruciating agonies and sepulchral horrors, from which she is ultimately rescued by the lugubriously poetic hero.

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This form of the novel may here be dismissed briefly. The romance of horror had from the start, and has always retained, a marked external plot. It feels strongly the impelling force of its "story," and sweeps onward toward some definite end. There is always a villain to foil, a tragic secret to unveil, and when this has been accomplished and the debris cleared away, the novel has obviously reached its final chapter. There is no turning another page, as Smollett did, and starting off afresh, as where in "Roderick Random" he says: "Baffled in my matrimonial schemes, I began to question my talents for the science of fortune-hunting, and to bend my thoughts towards some employment under the government." In the mystery story the plot became stronger than the hero. X

This was not so obviously true in the general novel form of the day, which was less dominated by a villain and a crime. Mackenzie's "Man of Feeling," for example, was not only classed as a novel but praised as such. This much admired work of the "Scottish Addison" is absolutely plotless. Harley, the man of feeling, wanders through various disconnected scenes, and meditates delicately over each. There is no more story than in the loose papers of the English Addison, half a century before. X

Only with the dominance of the woman novelists in England did plot become once more clearly outlined. This is perhaps but another way of saying that a novel centring about a heroine is naturally much more unified than one about a hero. To a young woman of that period, at least according to her own presentment of

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herself in fiction, there was just one end in life, matrimony. As it was not considered the proper thing for her to transfer her affections, or certainly not more than once, it followed that her destined mate must appear early in the tale. Then difficulties must intervene to prevent the lovers from marrying each other before the end of the book, which closed either with a wedding or a lovelorn death, quite as assuredly as the mystery tale did with a revelation.

The novels of Miss Burney emphasize this very clearly. So do those of a dozen authoresses less known. Even Miss Edgeworth, though she began her career by practising with moral tales for children and with rather plotless scenes from Irish life, was soon swept into the general current of pretty maids and popularity.

Evidently we are looking here upon external plot, dependent on incident and situation, not on great crises of the human soul. Of course some excitement was needed to keep the reader reading, and since the delicious ghostly thrills of the horror tale were denied them, the young lady heroines had to undergo some rather startling experiences. Few of them reached the end of their three volumes without an abduction or an elopement or something even more alarming. But these little departures from the commonplace of life were not taken seriously by their victims, either within or without the pages, and involved no such concentrated and classic tragedy as in "Clarissa."

It is well to emphasize the importance thus given in the novels of the later eighteenth century to both incident and excitement; because both were designedly dis-

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carded by that celebrated authoress who then began her work. Jane Austen produced half a dozen tales

**Simplicity of Plot in Jane Austen** wholly unlike anything that had preceded them, largely different from everything that followed, until a quite recent date. In each of her celebrated novels

there is a plot clearly marked, simple and complete. The heroine's love affair begins at the beginning and is the one theme pursued steadily to the close. Yet nothing startling ever happens. The lovers drift along amid the most ordinary and commonplace of occurrences with never a scream nor shout, not even a rousing curse nor an orotund defiance, such as gladdened the page of their predecessors. I spoke of Fielding as still dealing with the improbable in fiction; the work of Jane Austen might be called the apotheosis of the probable. In her tales the entire interest comes from the development of the lovers' feelings and relations toward each other. Her plots are as simple and natural as they are fully rounded, cumulative, and convincing. Despite their simplicity they hold our interest; and their completeness never seems mechanical.<sup>1</sup>

Thus suddenly, without warning, a new genius had seen a new potentiality in the novel's plot, and directed attention not to "moving accidents by flood and field," but to the simpler things of the common life, the natural course and change of ordinary human emotion. So radical an innovation was not likely to have immediate imitators.

<sup>1</sup>From this praise one must partly exclude her first novel, "Sense and Sensibility"; here the mechanical building of a road and driving her characters along it whether they will or no is very open and unconvincing.

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It is interesting to note how the lady novelists of Jane Austen's time, even the most successful ones, like Susan Ferrier or Mrs. Opie, caught at her style, imitated her thought, followed her in everything but this simplicity of plot. They could not imagine a tale without excitement, a novel without explosions.

Even Scott, great genius as he was, and keen and generous observer of the worth of all his predecessors, especially of Miss Austen, even he insisted on excitement and on grandiloquent situations in his novels. As an artist he mocked his own exaggeration, "doing the big bow-wow style," he called it; but as a man of business he gave his public what he believed they wished.

### **Influence of Scott**

Apart from this note of extravagance and something of diffuseness, most of Scott's novels have dramatic and consistent plots. Incident springs from incident, and leads, though without much cumulative force, to a definite external goal. His Scotch novels are particularly good in this, if one excepts "Waverley," the earliest of them, where for the first third of the tale his "unpractised pen" wandered confusedly. He knew not how to advance. "Waverley" on this point offers a most interesting comparison with Miss Austen's earliest sketch for a novel, "Sense and Sensibility." Each of these "prentice" efforts was laid aside for a decade or more before being offered to the public. Each of them was turned and twisted by its amateur author in an experimental way. In its final form "Sense and Sensibility" erred by making its plot too mechanically exact, by too obviously spelling out its lesson. "Waverley" began with hardly a thought



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of plot at all. Its author admired the Irish scenes of Miss Edgeworth's "Castle Rackrent," the Scotch scenes of Elizabeth Hamilton's "Cottagers of Glenburnie"; and he was led astray by the plotlessness of both his models. Only as the great master warmed to his work did his genius grow warm within him and give purpose and direction to the erstwhile rambling tale. With Jane Austen, the calmer, more self-centred thinker, the error in her first plot was her own; and only in contemplating the completed work could her artistic eye detect its over-emphasis, and so soften the outlines of her later novels.

Most striking of all Scott's plots is that in "The Bride of Lammermoor," published in 1819. Taking as his theme a tragic legend of his own land, he seemed to imbibe with it all the gloom, the world-woe, of the old Northern sagas. Fate, a savage Fate, dominates the tale at every point. A Romeo and Juliet of the North involve in their hopeless passion the ruin of both their houses, until the Juliet, forced into marriage with another, goes insane and slays her unwelcome husband on the bridal night. In a mere résumé, this may seem quite as external a plot as are most of Scott's; but the tale itself deals not with the incidents, but with the rising tide of passion, which they incoherently express. "The Bride of Lammermoor," therefore, marks again a step in plot development. It is like the work of Miss Austen in its dependence on emotion, on the internal life. But it adds to emotion a cumulative intensity which is Byronic. And it summons to its aid that overpowering dominance of Fate, which links it to classic tragedy.

In the first twenty years of the nineteenth century one

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can thus find isolated examples of perfected plot; but there was no universal recognition of its importance, nor of its need for internal depth. The most-talked-of work of fiction in the year 1819 seems to have been not "The Bride of Lammermoor," but Thomas Hope's "Anastasia," a splendid, gorgeous, picaresque tale of Eastern rogueries and adventure, with no more plot in it than "Gil Blas." And in 1821 all London was reading and raving over Pierce Egan's "Life in London, or Tom and Jerry," which is so hopelessly not a novel, not even a piece of literature at all, that I can only ask the reader who has never seen this Caliban to look the book over sometime as a curiosity.

The decade from 1825 to 1835 was notably barren of English novels of the highest rank. Scott had done his best work, and under pressure of a grim necessity was doing his worst. Cooper in America, and Disraeli, Bulwer, and Marryat in Great Britain were the chief writers of English fiction. For the first time the supremacy in novel writing passed from England over to France.

### **The Development of Plot in France under Balzac**

In this examination of plot it has not previously seemed necessary to follow French fiction, because France awoke more slowly to a recognition of the novel's art. As early as 1733 the Abbé Prévost had written one tale, "Manon Lescaut," which contains a fairly definite though rather haphazard plot. But even this much unity was only a happy accident; for the Abbé's other tales are as rambling as the idlest of the old romances. What France caught from Richardson was his sentiment, not his unity; and

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under the leadership of Rousseau the French novel had become a mere bundle of sentimental reflections and picturesque descriptions. It became also autobiographical, a sort of public confessional, wherein under thinnest disguise the writer poured out his own feelings, told his own experiences and *affaires du cœur*. This offered, of course, delightful opportunity to the writer. Friends could be portrayed with generous compliment, and foes revealed in their true hideousness. It was what Madame Lafayette had done, what Rousseau had done, and what Madame de Staël and others did in Napoleon's day. It was interesting; but it was scarce a novel. The form came too close to actual life, which, as we have elsewhere pointed out, is plotless, just because it is composed of the loose ends of a thousand plots.

French fiction begins to assume its modern aspect only with the rise of Hugo and Balzac. Hugo's first novel, "Hans of Iceland," appeared in 1825, his celebrated "Notre Dame" in 1830. Balzac's "Last Chouan" was published in 1829, his "Eugenie Grandet" in 1832, "Père Goriot" in 1834. George Sand's "Indiana" came out in 1832. Then followed Mérimée and Gautier. This makes a remarkable group of celebrated writers. With them the supremacy of the novel passed over to France, where, so far as form, as mere technique, is concerned, some critics declare it has ever since remained.

In "Hans of Iceland" the external, adventure plot is clearly marked. In Hugo's greater work, "Notre Dame," he presents, on a broad canvas and with many figures, a plot loose but powerful, and gathering with cumulative intensity toward the end, a design more than the equal

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of most of Scott's. With Balzac we come to that most marvellous, completed world, the "*Comédie Humaine*." The design of this lifework of a master has been so often described and praised that I need speak of it but briefly here. It offers us another interesting advance. Plot is extended beyond the limits of a single tale, and in a vague form spreads itself through more than forty separate novels. Each of these has its own completed plot, what we might call the threefold plot, the march of a series of outward events to a catastrophe, the sympathetic tracing of some great emotion to its usually tragic climax, and also the development of a character through these grim experiences of life. With such firmness, such surety is all this done in the majority of Balzac's works, that I know no better counsel for the student of form than that he should sketch for himself again and again the plan, the outline, and the progress, of some one of Balzac's works, perhaps "*Père Goriot*." Nor does the author's plan cease with the single work. Characters which have been shown us either in glimpse or full detail at one stage of their career are caught up again in some later book and shown in some new light, either as principal or subordinate, that we may see how far they fulfill the promise which was in them.

If there is any possible criticism of the individual novels of Balzac, it is that they attempt to cover too wide a field. There are so many characters, and each is so dwelt upon, so lingered over, that we lose the effect of concentration. In Victor Hugo's later great work, "*Les Misérables*," this defect of diffuseness is even more strongly marked.

Generally speaking, however, the charge of diffuseness

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can not be brought against the French novelists. Such is not the spirit of France, where the power of form, of concentration, is always strongly felt. Indeed, its merits were being impressed upon the French novel by Balzac's own contemporaries. Gautier and even more Mérimée are in this respect an improvement upon the greater master.

In England the tendency to a "sprawling formlessness" becomes very marked in the writers who succeeded Scott.

### **The English Increase in Complexity**

The "Wizard of the North" had, especially in some of his historic novels, such as "Ivanhoe," introduced many figures; but he was by instinct a story-teller, and his story held always the centre of the stage. There is no surer test of this than the fact that Scott continues a favorite author among children. Employing this same test, we see at once that the obverse is true of Scott's successors, Disraeli and even Bulwer. Disraeli is commonly said to have originated the political novel; and whatever interest his fulminations still retain is assuredly due to their historic rather than their fictional character. They are brilliant records of men and motives, of monologues and meditations, in the era which their writer so largely dominated. Bulwer also, painstakingly and persistently as he toiled at the work to which he had nobly dedicated his life, never once succeeded in keeping a story fully alive. It was half drowned under history as in "Harold," or under archæology as in "Pompeii." It starved amid multiplicity of life, choked with cynicism as in "Pelham," or with philosophy as in "Kenelm Chillingly."

Probably the English novel reached its widest limit of

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complexity under the masters of the next two decades, Dickens and Thackeray. Dickens' great initial success, "Pickwick Papers," contains over three hundred and fifty characters. It is charming, whimsical, a wonderful gallery of portraits painted with unending vigor and humor. It is anything you like except a story. That it never pretended to be. It started to give a series of scenes of English life, in shilling parts, uniting these by the same device Addison had employed in the "Spectator" over a century before, a club, the members of which should give their views and experiences. It was the direct successor, though of course in a vastly higher type, to Egan's crude "Life in London," to which Thackeray compared it; and like its predecessor of fifteen years before, it "swept the town." But it is called a novel only by careless association with its author's later works.

That he himself felt the formlessness of his first success is evident from the care he took with the "story" in all his later books. As we read back, indeed, through his letters and his notebooks we find that the "story" question troubled him more than any other part of his labor. He had always easily at hand a dozen groups of keenly realized characters, balanced in humorous and dramatic attitude toward one another—but he complains that he can not get them to moving. He has too many threads; they will not all weave into a single strand. He notes again and again pathetically, almost despairingly, that the story halts, he can not see his way. And then in some triumphant burst he declares that the end is in sight at last, "I am writing rapidly."

In only two of his works, and those among his latest,

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does the story rise clearly above this huge mass of characters and comments, which confuse it. If we bar these two, "Dombey and Son" and "A Tale of Two Cities," it is interesting to approach a lover of Dickens with the challenge to tell off-hand the plot in any one of the master's so often read and repeated tales.

Thackeray had a much easier control of plot than his great contemporary. Yet even Thackeray could not whip his multitude of figures into orderly and unified progression. Both "Pendennis" and "The Newcomes" are confessedly wandering, disjointed tales. You pick them up and lay them down, interested in the incidents, deeply touched and swayed by the characters and meditations, but not carried onward toward some great culminating point and power, not swept away on some surging, irresistible tide of passionate emotion.

"Vanity Fair" is much better, but even here we find a twofold plot, two stories harnessed side by side and driven as a team with dexterous skill. Always you are conscious of this. Unfortunately, an author must write with a single pen, hence one member of the team is usually reined in, champing and prancing, till the other can catch up. Amelia Smedley and her tale have only a chance connection with Becky Sharp and hers. "Let me show you," the author seems to be saying, "how a good girl may be happy though she is very silly, and how a bad girl may be unhappy though she is very clever." This is undoubtedly moral, if unconvincing; but it is not artistic in that higher sense where art is nature. Nature does not read us her lessons in assorted, antithetic pairs.

So far as plot goes, Thackeray's most successful effort

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is undoubtedly "Henry Esmond." Though even here it is not difficult to detect a structural weakness. It seems clear that the plot shifted as the author advanced until its conclusion became a hybrid thing, imperfectly grafted upon the original design.

Glancing back over the last few paragraphs, we certainly do not seem to be establishing any thesis as to the primal necessity of plot. Rather as we pass from one wide-read master to another we seem to discover a disconcerting lack either of feeling for or success in attaining unity. And when to Dickens and to Thackeray and to Hugo in his "Miserables" we add their contemporary, Dumas, with his thrilling tales of adventure continued indefinitely through volume after volume, almost as guiltless of unity as some mediæval romance, one might begin to question whether plot is necessary after all. These masters, however, worked in what was still a formative period; the technique of the novel was not yet fully understood. They were great in spite of, not because of, lack of concentration. And let us keep in mind that each one of these writers felt the value of the plot, and struggled to maintain it in face of the almost overwhelming difficulties of attempting to paint all life, moving amid innumerable characters. Dickens never wrote a second "Pickwick Papers." Thackeray's "Yellowplush Papers" were his early work, mere preludes to "Vanity Fair" and "Esmond."

Moreover, as opposed to these incomplete forms we have the work of Balzac, who did manage an almost infinite complexity without confusion; and we have the



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whole course of French literature since Balzac. Dumas, and in lesser degree Hugo, are merely the exceptions to the almost passionate devotion to form which the French novelists developed.

In America, too, the art of construction advanced. Hawthorne is universally accepted as one of the great masters of plot. In his "Scarlet Letter" there are really but three characters.<sup>1</sup> Around them we are made conscious of a whole passing world, yet our attention is never for a moment distracted from those central three. And with them, it is the inner not the outer being that we scrutinize. The frame, the bodily garb of Hester Prynne may be familiar to most of us; but the inmost passions of her soul are even more familiar. It is with these that the story deals, as with scant pause for incident it sweeps us on and up to a catastrophe not sprung from accident but embodied in the very beginning. To follow one of the author's own favorite symbolisms, the final poisonous flower lay in embryo in the very first seed sown. We feel, we surely feel, that we are dealing at last with inevitable things. Not in the chances of life, but in the growth or shrivelling of our own souls, lie reward and punishment.

If Hawthorne in almost every one of his novels presented us with a story of restrained perfection, an harmonious unit of simplicity scarce excelled through all our literature, he was not alone in the Anglo-Saxon reaction against complexity. Of even earlier date than the "Scarlet Letter" is Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre"; and less than a decade later George Eliot began her work.

<sup>1</sup>Little Pearl is not a character but a poetic symbol.

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To account for the unity and strength of plot in "Jane Eyre" is easy. It was the author's singleness of thought and earnestness of emotion which prevented her plot from ever straying for one moment. To explain the marvellous perfection of George Eliot's early plots is a more difficult problem; for they cover a wider field, more numerous characters and more varied emotions. There is in them none of that narrow, passionate intensity by which both author and reader may be rushed blindly along. Whether we turn to "Silas Marner" or "The Mill on the Floss" or even "Adam Bede," we find ourselves guided through the network of human feelings by a spirit guide serenely calm. The unity which we recognize, and the cumulative force, are there by the volitional choice of a conscious artist.

In her later works, "Daniel Deronda" and "Middlemarch," George Eliot attempted to cover an even broader canvass. She yielded to the influence of her great British predecessors in their examples of complexity. And her success was no greater than theirs. We may take Balzac's broadly comprehensive world as our ideal of perfection of plot, or we may take Hawthorne's narrow intensity, each of us choosing according to taste; but by no amount of blindness can we take the mass of British writers between the eighteenth twenties and the sixties, Thackeray, Dickens, Bulwer, Disraeli, G. P. R. James, Ainsworth, Lever, and their generation.

With Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins and Kingsley we reach men of later mold, authors in whom the sense of plot is much more strongly developed. Beyond them

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we come to the generation of living men. The first novel of George Meredith appeared in 1859; of Ebers and of Blackmore in 1864, of Mark Twain in 1869, of Hardy in 1871, and Howells in 1872. It is no part of my intent to criticise their work. In a later chapter I shall seek to make some general divisions based partly on what has here been said of plot. But for the moment, looking at these works of contemporaries still among us, I would only point out that the plots of Hardy and of Ebers are striking and complete. Those of Blackmore and Meredith seem a little more loosely woven. Twain's first published volume of fiction was "Innocents Abroad," and Howells' "Their Wedding Journey," each of these a sketch of travel, with only the thinnest thread of connecting plot. In other words, during the past forty years we can find plot performing almost every possible office in fiction, from the minor duty of lending a touch of sympathy or humor to a book of travels, to its major part as chief factor in some mighty moving, irresistibly advancing tale.

Of the minor questions involved in the plot's technique, some have been touched in passing. The beginning must establish us at a clear starting place, and suggest whither we are to go. The opening chapters seek to catch our interest, or who will look beyond? This interest, once aroused, should be increased in intensity and the rate of movement should increase with it until the result, the catastrophe, comes upon us with a rush. Then the fewer loose ends that lie around for cleaning up, the better. Such admitted principles hardly need repeated enumera-

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tion, though of course in those novel forms where plot is subordinate, their weight decreases.

All these details fall back largely upon the earlier suggestion that the novel should be regarded as a set of steps. A writer may begin these with the sudden perpendicular rise of incident, to lift us into interest; or he may begin on the horizontal plane, with character description. We climb his first steps leisurely, and linger on the level tread between. But, as we get more and more the sense of altitude, of being raised out of our own existence into an atmosphere of passion and intensity, we mount faster, eager for the summit. From its height the view outspread before us is not, or should not be, the idle vision of a child. It should offer us in some sort a new outlook upon life. If I may repeat what I have already said in speaking of Balzac, the perfected plot should be threefold. It should lead us to the summit of our climb by an interesting narrative of some series of outward events closing in a catastrophe, by a sympathetic tracing of some great emotion rising to a culmination, and also by a thoughtful study of some unformed character developing through these experiences of life.

## CHAPTER III

### MOTIVE AND VERISIMILITUDE

#### The Beginnings of Verisimilitude

If verisimilitude be accepted as the central characteristic of the novel, the career of the latter commences with Defoe. Mr.

Dawson has adopted this standpoint in his notable "Makers of English Fiction." Opening his book with Defoe, he says: "He had unconsciously hit upon the primary principle of fiction, that fiction is a kind of lie, and that it is useless to lie unless you can lie so like the truth that you are believed." Hence Mr. Dawson starts with a discussion of Defoe's early pamphlets, "The Shortest Way with Dissenters" and "True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal," and leads onward through Swift's "Gulliver." He points out how, if we grant Swift's one initial invention, a land of midgets or of giants, everything that follows is not only logical but necessary, is painstakingly true.

This does not mean that with either of these authors verisimilitude was the conscious end in view. In his "Shortest Way" Defoe aimed to confound his political opponents. (By his "True Apparition" he planned to advertise an unsalable book on death.) Swift sought to insult humanity. What each man almost accidentally did, wholly apart from what he intended to do, has given him fame.

Here we stumble at once upon that involution of

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verisimilitude with other "motives," which makes it easier in our present work to treat of them together.<sup>1</sup> Verisimilitude long since rose from the position of an accident to that of a central aim. It should be, we are assured by many writers, the sole "motive" of the novelist. He must seek only to present life as it exists. We are warned that, the moment any further purpose creeps into a writer's mind, it obscures his "picture of life," it brings in bias, and the picture becomes distorted. In this way the greater value is sacrificed for the less. The temporary purpose may be attained; adherents may be gained for some neoteric doctrine; but the world in general is plunged deeper into error, into the misunderstanding of humanity.

Perhaps this line of argument is largely theoretical. Perhaps the aim to paint truly may not be impossible of harmonization with other aims. Still, there exists an almost unanimous agreement among critics that the main motive should be the presentation of truth. So, we may treat motive and verisimilitude here in single discussion.

Historically, as we have seen, fiction was long in arriving at the conviction of its own essential need of verisimilitude. But once this recognition was attained, the law was adopted unreservedly, and has since remained perhaps the one unquestioned requisite

**Views  
of the  
Critics**

<sup>1</sup>A further source of confusion here has been already pointed out. By "motive" I would be understood to mean not the personal motives that secretly urged on the writer, the practical need for money, the trumpet call of fame, or the altruistic desire of elevating mankind—not the general motive in the man, but the specific motive in the book, the particular influence which it aims to have upon the reader.

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of the novel. The only dispute concerning it rises from the fact that truth evades mathematical demarcation. "Where is truth?" asked doubting Pilate. "It is here," cries the realistic novelist vehemently, "here in my books, and only here." "Nay, its higher form is here," insists the idealist, "here untainted with life's errors." "Here, here!" echoes the purpose novel. Even the romanticist finds truth within his heart. Hawthorne has urged this in his prefaces. He tells, for instance, of the finding of the elixir of life. Grant him what Swift demanded, the initial absurdity of the elixir's existence—if absurdity, alas, it be—and all the rest is real. The discoverers act exactly as we ourselves might act in the situation. The author simply conceives the human soul as facing new conditions, and so manages to cast a new light, a strangely vivid light, into its deeps.

Thus the dispute over verisimilitude often waxes warm, but none of the combatants are its enemies. Each of the doughty champions has caught a different glimpse of truth in its many sided beauty; and each one charges with keen-pointed pen in defense of the perfection of his own picture of the fair veiled lady. The contest just at present seems to lie mainly between the photographic writer on one side and a score of disunited antagonists upon the other. Few of us are willing to admit that photography is the highest art. As Mr. Frederick Bird has it, "Verisimilitude not verity is wanted in fiction. The observer notes his facts, and then the artist seizes on the ideas behind them."

Of somewhat earlier date was the almost hysterical attack upon the purpose novel. Its keen-eyed opponents

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claimed to detect every faintest intrusion of the lecturer. Sir Walter Besant by upholding moral purpose in his address on the "Art of Fiction" elicited the protest of Henry James. Thackeray and Dickens, Mr. James pointed out, might moralize as they would. Theirs had been but the childhood of art; but as to present-day writers he insisted, "The air of reality seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel—the merit on which all its other merits (including that conscious moral purpose of which Mr. Besant speaks) helplessly and submissively depend."

"I think it is very bad taste," writes Valera, the noted Spanish novelist, "always impertinent, and often pedantic, to attempt to prove theses by writing stories." Marion Crawford is even more vehement. "In art of all kinds," he says, "the moral lesson is a mistake. It is one thing to exhibit an ideal worthy to be imitated. . . . It is quite another matter to write a 'guide to morality' or a 'hand-book for practical sinners' and call either one a novel, no matter how much fiction it may contain." Gogol, the first of the great Russian novelists, pushes his demand for exact truth so far that it turns a somersault and becomes pure imagination. He says, if I may trust his translators, "I have studied life as it really is, not in dreams of the imagination; and thus I have risen to a conception of Him who is the source of all life." The critics also recognize the growing tendency. "The demand for strict fidelity to nature," says Mr. Traill, "has become imperious."

We seem then to be driving from the field every possible motive except the revelation of truth. I am not



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sure that in this, the practice always corresponds with the theory, even in the writings of truth's most vehement advocates. Perhaps, as in our discussion of plot, we may gain some light by an historical survey.

Defoe's verisimilitude, as has been often pointed out, is founded upon his insistence on minor details. So

### **Motive and Method of the First Novelists**

elaborately, so minutely, does he visualize each trifle connected with his creations, that we see them physically complete. Our imagination is not called on to give body to these full rounded figures. Most novelists for instance are content to tell us of the contemporary hero, that he is "stylishly dressed." Defoe gives us every article of attire with its shape, color, and quality of cloth. Frequently he even tickets it with the price. Hence the reader, being relieved of all creative effort, his imagination being lulled to sleep, feels himself assuredly moving in a world of fact.

With Swift, verisimilitude is gained by intellectual rather than physical completeness. A whole new world has been conceived, each part logically fitting in with every other. There are no breaks, no cracks, in the amazing microcosm, to make us realize that it is only artificial after all. Addison and Steele jest with us; they summon us to whim and fantasy and humor. Swift's irony is never confessed; he is portentously solemn and positive and matter-of-fact.

Richardson's verisimilitude is of yet other origin. On the whole I incline to call it even more instinctive than that of his earlier rivals. He set out to give ignorant folk examples of letter-writing. In earlier life he himself

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X had written letters for just such girls as Pamela, letters which the lasses seem to have despatched as their own. He had learned, as fully as man ever can, to place himself in the woman's situation, and not only speak but feel as she. So Pamela was real, not in the detail of outward circumstance surrounding her, this is often unconvincing; not in the logical construction and harmony of her story, this has been often and justly ridiculed for its falsity to life; but in the far deeper reality of her being, and of the springs of action which impelled her. The ladies of the day, as ignorant of outward life possibly as Richardson himself, were competent critics of this inner life; and in unanimous chorus they cried that Pamela was "woman." X (If Defoe's truth was physical and Swift's intellectual, Richardson's we may well call emotional.)

X In no one of these three writers, however, do we find what we have been seeking, what might be called the modern attitude of the novel, truth presented merely for its own sake as truth. Each writer made some other motive avowedly superior. Richardson, the one universally acknowledged novelist of the three, is particularly emphatic in insisting that he writes not to show you what woman is, but what she should be. He has a "Moral Purpose" with large initial capitals. He will teach young girls to discard their follies and control their passions; so shall they gain good husbands in the end.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>In a critical discussion which Richardson placed at the end of "Clarissa Harlowe" he says, "It will be seen by this time that the author had a great end in view"; and he goes on to explain that this end is, under the guise of diversion, to inculcate Christian doctrines. So also in a letter sent with the closing volumes to

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The full modern doctrine as to verisimilitude is first proclaimed by Fielding. He plunged into novel writing on purpose, be it remembered, to attack Richardson; and it was the latter's falsity that specially offended him; not falsity to woman but general falsity to life. Therefore Fielding started out with the deliberate purpose of presenting life as it really is. His critical remarks are constantly insisting upon this; and most of his contemporaries accepted his work at his own estimate, and declared that here at least was a true picture of existence.

Yet it is well to remember that the chorus of approval which greeted Fielding was not unanimous. There were dissentient voices, among which Dr. Johnson's rang out loudly; and it is certain that even "Tom Jones" would not be accepted as a model of verisimilitude to-day. We have been so repeatedly assured that it succeeded triumphantly in its main object of giving a perfect picture of the manners and morals of its time, that I shall not burden this present work with too close an analysis of the probability of such scenes as the famous graveyard contest of Molly Seagrim or the sudden prison-cell repentance of the hero. Suffice it to point out that we have already in the previous chapter criticised the plot as being brought to its dénouement through a series of improbable coincidences, and as being dependent throughout on the machinations of a melodramatic villain. We

Lady Bradsaigh, he writes, "they appear in the humble guise of novel only by the way of accommodation to the manners and taste of an age overwhelmed with luxury and abandoned to sound and senselessness."

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shall also in a following chapter have to take some slight exception to the characters themselves. None of these criticisms, however, detract from the central point, that in Fielding we have the positive enunciation of a great principle, which has assuredly been a main factor in the novel's rise.

Smollett, most notable of the disciples of Fielding, is even more successful than his master in adherence to this principle. His effort in this direction was made easier by his indifference to plot, which relieved him from all appeal to coincidence and from a too implicit dependence upon villainy. Moreover the narrow autobiographic character of his works, the fact that he does not, like Fielding, create his characters and incidents but mainly confines himself to describing such as he has actually seen, this certainly aids him in keeping close to truth. He has the virtues of his failings. (The photographic novel, with both its wisdom and unwisdom, looks back to Smollett.

From this time onward the question of verisimilitude was never absent from the novel's technique. Writers assume toward it widely differing attitudes, but they never overlook it. Their varieties of approach, which have been already suggested, may be marked out as four in number. From Fielding's work sprang the novel of manners, professing to devote itself, as he had done, to the sketching of realistic but imaginary pictures of the times. With this form we soon reach the perfection of accuracy. There could be no sketches of one little corner of life, more absolutely true than those of

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Miss Austen. Verity in that direction could go no further.

From Smollett came the photographic, autobiographic writers, insisting in their prefaces that they describe only such people and incidents as they themselves have encountered. From Richardson developed what at least in its early days was called the novel of sentiment, dealing only with "the workings of the human heart," analyzing these, and professing to find in the labor a higher truth, a truer art, than existed in external things.

As for the romanticists, the writers who sought to escape the tyranny of the actual, their treatment of verisimilitude is not unlike that of Swift, different as was their underlying aim. Walpole in his "Castle of Otranto" (1764) asks only the initial assumption, one that all superstitious folk, and now a few scientists as well, are disposed to grant. Once admit that ghosts may exist, and that they combine human feelings with other than human powers, admit this, and the "Castle of Otranto" becomes logical throughout, an entertaining history. It is notable, in fact, that Walpole made some study of verisimilitude. In his tale he deliberately deserts his own day—the first of the genuine novelists to do this—and places his events in preceding centuries, so as to get the indistinctness of outline, the vagueness which comes with remoteness of time or place, and which removes his supernatural events from clashing too sharply with common life.

The whole study of the development of verisimilitude in the novels of fear is very interesting. Walpole is frankly supernatural. The first of his followers, Clara

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Reeve, in her "Old English Baron" (1777), explains that she disapproves her predecessor's attitude, because people do not really believe in ghosts; hence she plans to keep her story within "the utmost verge of probability." Personally I do not feel nearly so positive as does Miss Reeve as to just where this dubious boundary line of probability extends; and if it must perforce be drawn, I should incline to set it in a locality widely separate from hers. I remember reading her story in college student days, and accepting her ghost with placid faith, rather admiring, indeed, his dignity and sincerity of purpose. It never occurred to me to doubt his existence; and even now, when in the light of Miss Reeve's own criticism and argument I re-read the tale, I can not follow it with any single vestige of faith, unless I accept the ghost in toto. Either he exists, or the whole book is a mere farrago of unexplainable nonsense.<sup>1</sup>

Beckford's "Vathek" (1786) takes the bolder course again, it deals frankly with magic and with visionary scenes. It assumes for the writer the high omnipotence and omnipresence of Imagination, follows its central figures into the Hall of Eblis, which is hell itself, and paints such a vivid, majestic picture of that tragic place as no reader is ever likely to forget.

Mrs. Radcliffe in her famous books (1789-1797) resumes the dubious attitude of Miss Reeve. We are

<sup>1</sup>It should be noted that Walpole sarcastically yielded the palm of verisimilitude to his follower. After ridiculing the incongruity of a ghost story "reduced to reason and probability," he wrote, "It is so probable that any trial for murder at the Old Bailey would make a more interesting story."

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summoned to feel all the thrills of the horrible and supernatural; but a loophole is always left open for some deception either of the reader or the characters, and in the last chapter everything is explained by human means. That is, the author assures us everything is explained, and balances herself lightly in giddy tight-rope fashion on that uncomfortable "verge of probability." But those explanations, even to the most trusting reader, must kill the story as with a club; they are the most unbelievable of all its horrors. The unexplainable may be accepted temporarily, while one seeks its meaning; but when Mrs. Radcliffe offers her weak solution, the intellect is directed specifically upon that, and reason scornfully rejects the whole. Take for instance the famous picture scene in "Udolpho." Emily, the heroine, raises a curtain from before what she supposes to be a picture, and immediately faints at the unnamed horror she discovers. In the end it is explained that she had seen a wax work figure and mistaken it for a murdered woman. How a dead body could be kept there without decay, or why it should be hidden in a picture frame anyway, sheltered from discovery only by a curtain, such common-sense reflections had no weight with silly Emily—and she must have been short sighted too. But why pursue such folly farther? This wild straining after the "utmost verge of probability" reminds the student irresistibly of the laughable devices of old Greek romance, the comic tragedies of Achilles Tatius.

The later romances of fear soon broke away from these childish leading strings. They deal boldly with the supernatural, or at least the superhuman, as in God-

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win's "St. Leon," Lewis's "Monk," Maturin's "Melmoth," Sue's "Wandering Jew." Other writers studied to approach horror through the hidden possibilities of science. The "first American novelist," Charles Brockden Brown,<sup>1</sup> in his "Wieland" (1798) has his unfortunate hero pursued by unbodied voices which drive him at length to madness and to murder. These voices are explained as the work of a malevolent ventriloquist, the art of the voice being then so little understood that the ventriloquial power is employed by Brown just as recent imaginative novelists have written of hypnotism and thought transference.

The fiction of fantasy thus took a most important step. It turned to play upon the boundaries, not of the impossible, but of the unknown. It assumed toward fear the only attitude still permitted by our own self-confident and scientific age. So also with Mrs. Shelley in her "Frankenstein." She tells of a scientist who discovers the source of life and infuses the vital spark into a monstrous figure of his own creation. The monster leads its maker to a tragic destruction. Modern readers may rank this at once among the impossible tales; but to the fascinated audience who gathered round Mrs. Shelley in Byron's Swiss château, it was only a vision of the reality to which science might some day lead.

<sup>1</sup>I accept this customary form of reference to Brown, because he was the first professional writer to devote himself, while dwelling in America, to the production of novels. Single works, which at least approached the novel, had been previously written here by men of other vocations, notably Judge Brackenridge's "Modern Chivalry," a very readable tale which one of its admirers has called "a profound philosophical and political work, under the guise of pleasantry." It deserves to be more widely known.



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At a later date the mysterious adopts a less positive tone; it seeks a subtler device. Under the masterly lead of Hawthorne and of Poe, it learns to deal with suggestion rather than assertion. Readers are set adrift in a vague region of doubt and question, amid shadows undefined. Thus, even in the freest type of romance, the desire for truth has grown increasingly strong. Only the fashion of truth changes.

Following yet another development of verisimilitude, one sees the purpose-guided novel of Richardson, leading

**Verisimilitude** to the extravagantly purpose-ridden tales  
**versus** of Voltaire. In "Candide" Voltaire  
**Purpose** meant to ridicule optimism. In order to deny that "everything is for the best"

he heaps upon his characters every excess of human misery and presents them as being equally unhappy in peace and in the midst of suffering, yet ever persistently crying out that all is best. The thing is grotesque in its extravagance of savagery. It offers one case at least where the carpers have been right: a dominant purpose, a cause to be established, has wholly destroyed verisimilitude.

Looking onward through the eighteenth century novels, it becomes more and more evident that the clash between verisimilitude and the purpose novel is genuine and deepseated. This fact is impressed by each new example. Not only do the great French writers give evidence of the conflict; it is shown also in Germany, where Wieland's tales, in this respect at least, are like Voltaire's. They seek to establish some deduction; and in the effort they unhesitatingly distort life. So in England

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X Brooke's "Fool of Quality" preaches the virtue of "natural" or uncivilized man—and insults civilization. Graves' "Spiritual Quixote" attacks Methodism—and reduces religion to burlesque. Thomas Day's "Sanford and Merton," ancestor to all the "goody-goody" books, shows boys how they should—but fortunately do not—behave. Discontent, socialism, and finally anarchism, run wild in the novels of Holcroft, Bage, and Godwin.

X Even Godwin's master work "Caleb Williams," which is one of the great forgotten books of the world, is carried by the author's anarchism to that "utmost verge of probability" which was the downfall of Miss Reeve. "Caleb Williams" is among the most impressive of these revolutionary writings that represent society as warring upon man. Williams suspects the murder secret of a powerful aristocrat, and is therefore hounded through life by the criminal. The hero flees and hides himself, but is tracked down and persecuted again and again. All the machinery of society is turned against him, through scenes of enormous power, till the tragic end. Intense as the book is in emotion, exciting in story, thrilling in incident, we reach its close in doubt; and as calmer judgment reasserts itself, we put the tale coldly aside. It is not true; it did not happen; human beings are not such as that. And so "Caleb Williams" is relegated to the realms of fantasy and classed even by careful critics with the author's supernatural "St. Leon" and Mrs. Shelley's "Frankenstein." Surely, as Professor Stoddard phrases it, "The great god Verity has his revenges."

In all this there is no proof that "purpose" and verisimilitude can not harmonize, but only that, in the

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examples given, they did not. Purpose seems in most cases to mean passionate devotion to a cause, hence lack of self-restraint, exaggeration. The writing of history has passed through a similar stage. There was a day when every historian wrote to demonstrate a thesis, and saw all history as having been arranged to prove his faith. When we consider that modern historical writing, honest, impartial and philosophic history, is usually dated as beginning only with Hallam and Niebuhr in 1818, we may pardon flighty fiction if she was even slower than her steadfast sister art to assume an evenly balanced, critic poise.

Yet in looking to the "purpose novels" of more recent date, one finds the same difficulty still thrust upon him. To Americans the great example of a purpose novel will probably for all time remain "Uncle Tom's Cabin." This was avowedly written to arouse public feeling against slavery. How indignantly have Southerners repudiated the picture! They declare it wholly false, not perhaps in its presentation of an isolated case, but in its underlying assumption that such was slavery. Or in England, consider Dickens writing of the boarding schools in "Nicholas Nickleby." He asserts in his preface that he gives merely "faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality," but adverse critics have called the book "a study in untruth," and declared that by his too openly personified caricature of Squeers and Fanny he "broke the hearts of two very decent people."

Purpose novels then must stir up controversy, that is if the purpose be vigorous enough to have any effect whatever. And the purpose novel in our exacting day

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must restrain its exaggeration, must be very sure indeed of all its facts. If it pose as serious, it will be taken very seriously, and must be ready to stand blows, as well as give them. It can no longer pursue its impertinent, irresponsible way, flaunting impossibilities with the airy grace and mendacity of "Candide."

In brief then, the novel of purpose carries within itself an artistic flaw, which is very apt to result in its destruction; but it also bears in its heart a possibility of passion and energy and earnestness, which may go very far toward making it a success. It is not a form to be too scornfully dismissed.

Another branch of fiction in which verisimilitude had a long struggle before it could fully assert its supremacy,

**Verisimilitude in the Historic Novel** was the historic novel. Over the mediæval past, the ancient romance of chivalry long asserted its grandiloquent control. This forgotten past was depicted as a fanciful region of errant knights riding through a world peopled only by monsters to be fought with, distressed damsels to be succored, and some insects known as common people to be killed in quantities for exercise. This dream-world, which had stirred Walpole, exercised its influence even more over Scott. His historic novels give us a mediæval picture fantastically like and yet unlike the reality. He did, however, grasp the central principle on which the historic novel depends. The main outlines of the life of each leader of an age are well known; they belong to history itself, and any tampering with them calls down upon the blunderer the "great god Verity." On the other hand, if a celebrated figure is

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outlined with strict historic accuracy, the result is too stiff, too hampered, to be a novel. Hence such figures can only be introduced in minor positions. They can hardly be made effective as central figures, for which the author needs freer play.<sup>1</sup>

This principle was realized by Scott, and hence his historic novels remain alive as stories despite much falsity to history. It was not realized at all by his predecessors. "The Recess" of Sophia Lee (1783), which has been loosely called our first historic novel, introduces Queen Elizabeth and all her court as central characters and misrepresents them with constant and courageous invention. So too with the once well-known tales of Jane Porter, "Scottish Chiefs" and "Thaddeus of Warsaw," over whose pathetic sentiment our ancestors wept much; these works have been dismissed to the oblivion which their ignorance deserves.

Scott was not ignorant. On the contrary he had been an eager student of the past, and had some standing as an antiquarian. He was thus in a position to do fairly accurate historic work, and externally he was not unsuccessful. He has given us correct details of costuming and of manners. His Louis XI is a wonderful portrait, some of his other figures hardly less so. But the great story-teller felt no compulsion to get to the heart of that ancient world and understand it all. He made small effort to recreate it; indeed he wholly miscreated it, seeing each period only as a panorama, an effective background for a tale.

<sup>1</sup>A fuller discussion of this point will be found in the chapter on "background."

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Dumas' abuse of history is even more irreverent. He publicly proclaimed that he had no faith in history as recorded by historians; and he took a harlequin's delight in letting his imagination play over its salient points, interpreting them by wildest guesswork. We all know the result: kings, queens and cardinals whirl in maddest dance around central figures like D'Artagnan. Fact is tossed to the wind, and history rewritten, to make each swashbuckler a hero.

Thackeray's "Henry Esmond" displays a far more artistic method. Recorded facts are never contradicted. A dubious thing, one of the perplexing problems of history is taken as the central point. Why did Queen Anne of England not follow her known inclination, and attempt to pass the inheritance of her crown to her Stuart nephew? An explanation for this is carefully built up, taking under consideration each known fact; and this explanation is then offered in the garb of romance. The historic interest is roused; it almost equals that of the "story." Moreover the picture of the times is perfect to the last detail.

With "Henry Esmond" then the historical novel may be said to reach its maturity. Verisimilitude has become its guide. Dickens read all Carlyle's library on France before writing his "Tale of Two Cities." We have modern writers even more conscientious than he. Stevenson, Professor Stoddard tells us, chanced to mention in one of his stories a kind of bird as being on a Pacific island at a certain season. Later the romancer learned that those birds were not found on that particular island at that particular season; and he insisted on hav-

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ing the trivial passage changed by his printer, although considerable expense was involved, the offending book being on the very eve of publication. Possibly an inserted errata slip would have satisfied the artistic conscience of most writers.

One lesser but very practical point may conclude our glance over this portion of our subject. The novel is in a sense the victim of its lowly origin.

### **Practical Difficulties in Attaining Verisimilitude**

In ancient days the aim of fiction was to astonish, so it told falsehoods, told them flatly and cheerfully. The modern novel has discarded falsehood. It aims to convince. Hence it is even more true than truth; it avoids and condemns the occasional extravagances of the actual. Yet it is still rejected as untrue. Serious-minded persons regard its reading as a waste of time.

Thus the novel is still suffering for the sins of its fathers. To accuse the novel form in general of falsehood is assuming a mistaken premise. The novelist does not assert that his characters exist in life, but only that they act as human beings would under such circumstances as he imagines. This convention being perfectly understood by even the youngest reader, the work becomes a philosophical treatise on human life, which the writer may approach seriously, romantically, or in burlesque. His fidelity is not pledged to actual truth of external incident, but to the internal harmony of his thoughts with truth.

The root value of verisimilitude thus lies in its high moral influence, but the universal demand for it springs chiefly from its artistic worth. Its surface need for

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even the most irreverent writer comes from its convincingness. It carries the reader away and makes him accept, and for an instant live wholly in, the author's world. Approached from this cheaply practical side the fact becomes evident, that what makes a story convincing is not at all the physical actuality of the incidents introduced; it is the general effect of truth, this underlying harmony of thought with truth, the ability to convey to other minds the appearance and impression of reality.

From many a youthful author have I received almost hysterical insistence that his tale must be believed, because it really happened. The plea, unfortunately, touches only the beginning of the matter. A real scene may have been so imperfectly viewed by the spectator, so wholly misunderstood, that his mental picture of it is quite false. Or even where the mental picture is correct, the inadequacy of its description on paper may result in conveying a false picture to the reader. There are thus three stages to a story's truth; and the novice, nay even the master, may fail at any one of them. There must be eternal verity in the idea itself; there must be the artist's verity of sight in studying and understanding it; and then must come the craftsman's technique to give verity of reproduction to the reader. Only from the combination of all three verities springs true verisimilitude.



## CHAPTER IV

### CHARACTER

#### **Early Drift of Character Study**

If in the progress of early fiction there is one development more striking than the slow advance of the ages toward unity of plot, it is the equally slow but persistent growth of character study. This art was, as we have seen, wholly unconceived among ancient tale-tellers. Interest in humanity, in the individual as differentiated from his fellows, arose with the Renaissance. In the short stories such as Boccaccio's and in the scenes of the picaresque romances, a thousand figures were presented to the reader, types viewed externally and with the emphasis laid upon their external difference, one from another. In a later stage of development writers have sought to look beneath the surface, to depict, not their characters' individual difference, but the common laws which underlie this and create it. Thus we come back in another guise to a point already raised: the character student of to-day seeks for that deep-rooted inevitable which molds the outward and accidental.

If one accepts the dictum of Mr. Howells and the many able exponents of similar views that character depiction is the central element and chief value of the novel, then the career of the latter begins with "Don Quixote." It is now a quarter century since James Russell Lowell wrote, "Cervantes is the

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father of the modern novel in so far as it has become a study and delineation of character, instead of being a narrative seeking to interest by situation and incident."

That the influence of "Don Quixote" upon the novel of the eighteenth century was deep and lasting there can be no question. The Spanish masterpiece was translated into English as early as 1612. It was one of the household books of the Puritan age, burlesqued by Beaumont and Fletcher in "The Knight of the Burning Pestle" and by Butler in "Hudibras." Even more marked was its influence over the succeeding century. One of Fielding's early efforts was a poor, rough-finished play on "Don Quixote in England." His "Joseph Andrews" he himself declares to be founded on the work of Cervantes. Smollett wrote a direct imitation of "Don Quixote" in "The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves." Mrs. Lennox made a novel of "The Female Quixote," Richard Graves of "The Spiritual Quixote," Wieland's "Don Sylvio of Rosalba" was a German echo. The masterpiece of Cervantes was world-known.

In most of these copies, however, it is not the character depiction of Cervantes that is imitated, but only the central idea, the plot: a fanatic rushes forth to right the world, flies in the face of established laws, and is defeated and laughed at for his pains. Fielding caught something of the deeper teaching of the master. Parson Adams, the real hero of "Joseph Andrews," is the English Quixote; and in following the sympathetic touches by which Fielding brought out this figure, one feels it not wholly unworthy of its great original. Yet

Fielding's  
Pictures of  
Types

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even Parson Adams fails to grow and change with his story. He is a finished picture, but only a picture, a figure fixed and immovable. Life leaves him where it found him. There is not one of his experiences that he would not have encountered again another time in the same spirit and with similar results. He is touched by stress and storm only as are the immovable mountains, slowly sinking into dust, but unchanging from within.

A similar readiness to deal with fixed types rather than changeable human beings—that is, to use the methods of the comedy drama of the time—is visible in Fielding's later work. He even employs the crude comedy device of symbolic names. • Squire Allworthy is prevented by his cognomen itself from being sinfully human. Whether his fortune be good or ill, though he be tried by all the miseries of Job, he must remain "all worthy." His merit is limited only by the capacity of his creator to conceive of worth. So, too, the pedagogues, Square and Thwackum, must stand throughout for mathematical stiffness and for savage brutality—else they will be false to their names.

In Jones himself and in Captain Booth of "Amelia," Fielding has given us studies of a far higher order. Tom

### **The Three Aims in Presenting Character**

Jones learns from experience; he develops, as all men develop. The Jones who uplifts the villain Blifil at the close is an older, kindlier, nobler man than the Jones who pounded this same villain Blifil in the early chapters. Whether the related experiences of Jones had been such as would tend to develop him along the lines of growth he follows is a question that

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brings us into a more modern psychology than agitated the eighteenth century. If you were good, life made you better; if you were bad, it reformed you—unless you were too bad, then it hanged you. Such was the comfortable doctrine of the sermonizing English novel from Defoe down to a much later date than Fielding. Early fiction, as we have already seen, had the obsession of its moral strong upon it.

Fielding, be it remembered, set out with the avowed purpose to portray life just as it existed. Hence while in his minor figures he may occasionally permit himself burlesque and whim, in his central characters, Jones and Sophia, Booth and, though less clearly, Amelia, he means to show us the ordinary man and woman of the day, unusual neither in their thoughts nor their deeds.

The aim of Richardson was neither so broad as that of his rival, nor so direct. He at first meant only to show woman as she should be, nor did his purpose ever reach very far beyond this. Hence his heroines are ideal, not real. Perhaps their very unreality explains why the ladies of the day so enthusiastically declared them accurate. The fair readers saw themselves in Pamela and Clarissa, but themselves in their better moments, freed from pettier thoughts, soaring above earth, and shining as angels without substance or material body.

Possibly most of us in similar situation would blushing admit the likeness of a portrait so delicately etherealized. We might even be exalted into believing it true. Certainly the ladies were not harmed by it; on the contrary, they strove to be what Richardson conceived them. It is a doctrine not without strong advocacy even to-day,

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that fiction should deal with the "higher truth," should endeavor to raise the world by depicting the ideal rather than the actual.

Thus there exist, running side by side through the entire history of the novel, three contrasted ways of presenting character. It is idealized, as in *Clarissa* and *All-worthy*; it is presented naturally, as in Fielding's chief figures; or it is caricatured, made whimsically false, as in the disputes of *Square* and *Thwackum*.

Smollett often uses this burlesque method with his lesser figures. His leading characters, like Fielding's, are true; or as true as the author's insight permitted him to see them. He himself was coarse and hard; so his *Roderick* and his *Peregrine* unconsciously become the same. They dwell in a bleak world, unwarmed by the wisdom, the tenderness, the universal love, of the greater portrait painter.

In the writings of *Sterne* we find the method of caricature pressed to its utmost limits, yet conceived in its finest spirit. His untruths are true; for always within the voluminous folds of the jester's cloak we catch the outlines of a wholly human form. Here is no gross, bloated, impossible and disgusting figure, such as too often disgraces the pages of modern pictorial caricature; here is a living being made only more captivating, more deliciously enjoyable by its mocking, mischievous disguise.

The lesser writers of that early day followed mainly the methods of Fielding. They attempted straightforward reproductions of the outer life of the times, actuality. "*Henry*," the best novel of Richard Cumber-

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land, is a professed copy of "Tom Jones"; and a comparison of the two may emphasize the greatness of Field-

### Dangers of Realism

ing's success in depicting real life. Cumberland was a poet and a noted writer of comedies; he had a critic's eye for the style of his novelistic predecessors, and discussed their methods with broad intelligence. Yet what a prig is this hero of his! Henry is a foundling, of course, valiant and beautiful and modest and good—and most amazingly given to moralizing. In the most exciting situations he will start off a page-long oracular defense of his severely tried morality. He is wooed by women of every description, in scenes approaching the absurd. Fortune after fortune is left him by admirers, and he declines them regularly with great magnanimity. The book presents an observer's knowledge of life, but never a master's. The characters are repeatedly found in false and artificial positions "for the sake of the story."

In other words, among lesser writers the true divination of character has proved itself no easy task. They are hampered, as Smollett was, by imperfectness of insight and understanding, by the error of little minds, which have always interpreted "knowledge of the world" and "truth to life" as synonymous with coarseness and vulgar cynicism. Such is the narrow aspect under which Coventry's "History of Pompey the Little" or Johnstone's "Chrysal or the Adventures of a Guinea" draws its portrait gallery of characters. These two may be taken as typical of a large class of early works which follow some article of property, as a lap-dog or a guinea, through its possession by a series of owners, whose lives are thus

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viewed from an outside yet peculiarly intimate standpoint. "Pompey" is a lewd and thoroughly disgusting book; yet its characters are drawn from ladies of the time, and Lady Montagu has left on record that she preferred this work to Smollett's "Peregrine Pickle." Hence its coarseness was not wholly offensive to the age; its pictures can not be wholly false. Realism was early tempted into a most unpleasant slough.

From such disagreeable reading one turns with relief to note the different attitude assumed by fiction in pursuit

**Dangers of Idealism** of the ideal. Richardson's influence was far stronger upon women than upon men. Goldsmith's characters are ideal-

ized; so are those of Mackenzie; but in the main it was the rapidly increasing group of "lady novelists" who followed Richardson's lead. His sway extended over even such a hardened hack writer as Mrs. Heywood. She had been one of the principal scribblers of fiction before 1740, purveyors of tales of physical indecency. In 1751 she published "The History of Miss Betsey Thoughtless," the Moral Purpose of which is writ as large as Richardson's, while its heroine is not wholly unworthy of him. So, too, we may trace the womanly devotion to ideal figures through the work of Sarah Fielding, sister to the great realist, but spiritually akin rather to his rival. The line passes on through Charlotte Lennox and a dozen lesser figures, until even as late as 1810 appeared Mrs. Brunton's "Self-Control," a deliberate imitation of "Clarissa."

Unfortunately this pursuit of perfection soon lost all connection whatsoever with reality. The persecuted

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

heroine could do no wrong, except it were that of trusting blindly. The amorous villain became a mere personification of evil; and the sighing hero, the "man of sentiment," was as unhuman as his victims. This is a bit unjust if applied specifically to Mrs. Brunton, whose work ranks not entirely below that of the novelists of wider fame. In "Self-Control" she attacks sentimentality with vigor and some wit. Yet her own persecuted orphan heroine has wondrous beauty and auburn hair and is named Laura Montreville. The handsome, polished villain who abducts her, and whom her pathetic virtue finally drives to despair and suicide, is called Villiers Hargrave. The priggish hero is Montague DeCourcy, while the common people of the book are compelled to the disgrace of common names, and are Dawkins and Wilkins and Stubbs.

Of course in the confessedly romantic novels, such as Mrs. Radcliffe's, this departure from reality, this spurning of common life and common character, is carried to even greater excess. Under such leadership the novel seemed rapidly returning to all the extravagances of the chivalric romance, resuming the form from which it had differentiated centuries before.

Fortunately there was a stronger, saner influence summoning the novel back from these two extremes of gush and of vulgarity, and guiding it into the path of genuine character study. The work of Miss Burney has been often quoted as leading this reform; but we ought also to note the even earlier influence of the educational novel. This began with Rousseau. His theories of

**The Escape  
from These  
Extremes**



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education, of the evil influence of our civilization upon the expanding mind of youth, pervade all his works. "Emile," as a novel written specially to emphasize this, naturally dwells upon the development of its central figure. Emile himself may on close examination seem quite as imaginary and impossible a figure as any Radcliffe heroine; but he has at least the air of truth. He is approached seriously, as the ordinary, not the extraordinary, mortal. So, too, the "Paul and Virginia" of St. Pierre, romantic in its story, deeply poetic in its style, has yet this germ of character study, development through education.

The influence of these works, especially of "Emile," was very wide; and the educational novel had for a time a vogue of its own. In England, Mrs. Inchbald, the noted actress, wrote "A Simple Story" upon this theme, and then "Nature and Art." Brooke's "Fool of Quality" has the same central idea. Miss Edgeworth in her first great novel, "Belinda," supplies one character, Virginia, as an intentional example of the application of Rousseau's educational theories.

Neither must one forget in this connection the most remarkable piece of character drawing that appeared in the half century that separates the first great novelists from Jane Austen. In 1786 John Moore published his "Zeluco." As a novel this is poor, being wandering and discursive. Its own sub-title describes it faithfully, "Various Views of Human Nature, taken from Life and Manners, Foreign and Domestic." But it is unique in that it takes the character of a bad man, a figure unrelieved by power or by romance, and frankly and seriously traces his career from birth to death. Moore mocks at

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

the saints and fiends he finds in other novels, and claims to describe human nature as it really is.<sup>1</sup> Zeluco, badly educated in the beginning, sinks from evil to evil, suffering to suffering. Vice is depicted as its own punishment, and the moral enforced is the comment of a character in the tale, "Never be such a fool as to be a knave."

Such works as these kept alive a genuine feeling for character. In Mrs. Inchbald's work this is particularly notable. Her "Simple Story," though not published until 1791, when she had become noted as an actress, was written about 1778, that is before the influence of Miss Burney had become widely established. Mrs. Inchbald started her tale apparently in holiday mood, sketched in her puppets to uphold her theories and then stared at them in amazement, discovering they were alive. Her running commentary on them is always one of surprise. She sees they are not acting according to rule; she apologizes for them; she even scolds them. But they have grown to her too real to be wholly under subjection; they are always breaking loose. The book offers a most interesting study of an unconscious power, of a half-formed art.

Deliberately conscious and far superior to this crude work were the first two novels of Miss Burney. She has been called the creator of the novel of manners; that is,

<sup>1</sup>Says Moore, "The race of those perfect beings incapable of weakness, and invulnerable to vice, who are ever armed at all points, and cased in virtues as the knights of chivalry were in mail, has intirely failed . . . till these opposite extremes, men intirely good or completely wicked, appear again, we must be contented with that mediocrity of character which prevails, and draw mankind as we find them, the best subject to weaknesses, the worst imbued with some good quality."

## CHARACTER

of character viewed as to its externals rather than its soul, and of "society," dealing only with the people of the author's own circle in life. Yet her work

### Character Revelation in the Autobiographic Novel

is not wholly external. There is a soul in Evelina, though perhaps not a very deeply realized one; and also in some of the minor characters. Thus, for instance,

the Smiths and the Brangtons are not presented simply as vulgar persons. The reader is invited to look into their hearts; he is shown what lies there to make them vulgar.

In this respect Miss Burney is superior to her greater successor, Miss Edgeworth, whose minor figures, and generally her major ones as well, are frankly, coldly, types. Their creator thus stands rather aside from the development of the novel under the women who dominated it from Miss Burney down to Scott. Its main development was in depth of character presentation.

"'Fool,' said my Muse to me, 'look in thy heart and write!'" So sang Sidney, and the women of this period understood his meaning. Their novels are largely autobiographic, but in a different sense than Smollett's. He retailed what he had seen, and perchance misread; they what they had felt, and intuitively understood.

It has become almost a truism, that every human being has within himself the material for one good novel. This lies not in the events of his life, which may have been trivial, but in his thoughts and feelings, which make him individual. These may be more or less frankly revealed, they may be touched by the brush of fancy; but if the author does not pervert their essence, he has real human nature to disclose, real, new truth to tell. Of course if

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this autobiographic study is extended through more than a single tale or character, it grows thin, the stream dries up, each figure tends to become a mere echo of the first. Hence we have, and will always have, the novelist of a single book, like Du Maurier or, in a subtler sense, like Goldsmith. In France Madame Lafayette had been her own Princess of Cleves. Madame de Staël gave life and truth to her own personification in "Delphine" and "Corinne." So Mrs. Inchbald's characters defied her pen, because they were herself and her intimate friends, not visionary figures at all. Miss Burney managed to extend her bright personality through two books, two heroines, Evelina and Cecilia. Her later novels were failures.

It is for this reason that Miss Edgeworth is commonly regarded as a greater novelist. Though there is much of herself scattered through all her books, yet these are not only numerous, but varied. She does not merely record, she creates.

With this subject of self-revelation in view, it is interesting to turn to Jane Austen and inquire just how much of herself this remarkable artist has written into her heroines. She confined her work with Quaker-like severity to the world she knew, refusing every inducement to step beyond it. Hence she never attempted to portray any tragic deeps, any convulsive upheavals of emotion. Hers is a character study, quiet, humorous, practical. The figures passing before her in life she depicts with accuracy and understanding. Her male personages share with some of those of George Eliot the honor of being the only woman-drawn portraits of man

The  
Art of  
Jane Austen

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that man accepts. Yet each of her six novels centres around a heroine, who is the most fully developed character of the tale. Which of these six is Miss Austen herself? Are they all she, or none of them?

The authoress has been frequently associated with her Elizabeth Bennet in "Pride and Prejudice," and it is notable that Elizabeth is the one of the six heroines who most largely and naturally "develops" through the experiences of the story. Young authors, however, usually insert most autobiographical detail into their earliest work, and "Pride and Prejudice" was not Miss Austen's maiden effort. In that earlier manuscript that she rewrote as "Sense and Sensibility," the two sisters Eleanor and Marianne bear, despite their stiffness, a general likeness to Elizabeth and Jane Bennet. Perhaps both novels are self-studies, only the later one is firmer, keener, and lightened by some fanciful touches. The personal descriptions of Miss Austen with which her contemporaries have supplied us represent her without the sprightliness of Elizabeth, though escaping the heaviness of the earlier Eleanor. At any rate, there can be no questioning the power and truth and delicacy of each picture in this remarkable gallery of heroines. Later art could make no improvement on their perfection.

There were, however, fields Miss Austen did not touch, regions still open for the advance of character depiction.

**Advance in  
Character  
Development** The novelist could analyze instead of merely portraying; and he could find figures far more interesting than her well-trained demoiselles, souls made mightier by passion, more dignified by breadth of living.

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Moreover, there was still the problem of character development not clearly grasped and brought within the control of the novel's technique.<sup>1</sup> Through the prefaces, criticisms and appreciations of the eighteenth century there runs much talk of character, of its creation and "conservation," its "sustainment." But these terms seem only to mean that the poor character shall be compelled never to disobey its laws as first announced, never to step down from its frame.

It is this very rigidity that makes types instead of human beings, figures built up from without, not realized from within. As Mr. Howells phrases it, "When the desire for character arose, the novelists loaded their types with attributes; but still there was no character, which is rooted in personality." Again in speaking of the figures of a writer of the early nineteenth century, he says, "They are as infallibly themselves as so many lunatics." Our changes, our inconsistencies, he points out, are what make us human.

Perhaps one had best leave Mr. Howells to say for himself just where he would draw the line upon this presentation of lunatics in novels, and consider "personality" as beginning. Most of us would probably regard the full power of character creation and realization as arising with Balzac in France, with Hawthorne in America; and in England, passing over the exceptional case of Miss

<sup>1</sup>I do not wish to be misunderstood as finding a lack of development in Miss Austen's heroines. Some change in them is shown, but as a rule the experiences through which they pass are not of a nature to cause any notable growth. Even Emma, in the story of that name, does no more than resolve to control certain of her failings, after she has seen the pain that she has caused by them. There is no deep alteration within her.

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Austen and possibly of Fielding, we would begin it as late as Thackeray.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand there may be some who will call even Thackeray's figures "types loaded with attributes" and carry us down to George Eliot for genuine character analysis. Then steps in so notable a critic as Mr. Brownell to tell us that even George Eliot's characters are only half realized, are intellectually but not emotionally alive. This suggests obviously the dictum that emotion is the unmeasurable factor which, disturbing intellectual character, causes human "inconsistency." But the whole question of emotion may wait for its separate chapter, and escape discussion here.

Returning to our historical survey, we find that Scott

**Last Efforts  
of the  
Idealists** admire, with his broad sight he did admire, the work of Miss Austen and Miss Edgeworth. He spoke of the former's "exquisite touch, which renders ordinary, commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment"; and of the latter's "wonderful power of vivifying all her persons"; but for himself he took the easiest road.

To his genius, story telling was far easier than character discrimination. So his heroes, Quentin Durward, and Ivanhoe, and the Knight of the Leopards, are cut from a single cloth. As to his heroines, it has become one of the commonplaces of criticism to declare that they are all exactly alike, empty pictures of a gallant gentleman's ideal. Exception to this must be taken in favor of

<sup>1</sup>Perhaps another exception should be made in favor of some of Galt's Scottish characters; consider, for instance, his charming, whimsical Provost.

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

some of his Scottish maidens. I know no truer, no more wholly realized (not analyzed), figures than Effie and Jeanie Deans. In them Scott was dealing with folk such as he had known all his life, as to whose feelings he could not go astray. Always in speaking of Scott we are forced back upon the same regret: if only he had allowed himself for each book a little more time, a little more of thought, a little more of effort, what a mighty master he would have been.

Possibly our own Cooper did quite as much as Scott in keeping the eyes of novel readers fixed upon ideal figures; and it was into a world dominated by them that Hugo at twenty-three, Disraeli at twenty-two, Bulwer at twenty-four, Balzac at thirty, each projected a first novel with characters tinged by the same exaggeration and unreality. Three of these youthful writers quickly found firmer footing, and so in time did even Hugo, the greatest romanticist of all.<sup>1</sup>

The two decades between 1830 and 1850 witnessed that brilliant struggle between the two divergent schools. They saw the final opulent flowering of the old romance; and they watched the ever-increasing devotion to actuality push romance from its throne. The spirit of the ages seemed reversed; for old men clung to the ideal pictures

<sup>1</sup>Disraeli's first novel, "Vivian Grey," extravagant almost to absurdity, was published in 1826, his restrained and masterly "Henrietta Temple" ten years later. Bulwer's fanciful "Falkland" appeared in 1827, his carefully studied "Pompeii" in 1835. Balzac's earliest notable work, "The Last Chouan," was issued in 1829. It is thoroughly romantic; yet his realistic "Eugenie Grandet" followed it as early as 1832. As for Hugo, his first published work, "Hans of Iceland," came out in 1825, but his "Les Miserables" not until 1862, and his most nearly realistic novel "Ninety-Three" not until 1874.



## CHARACTER

of their youth, while young men asserted the value of the real, the actual. Scott died in 1831, but Cooper continued writing during the entire period. His "Deerslayer," with its beautiful pictures of the hero and his Indian comrade, Chingachgook, did not appear till 1841. Lever's poetical Irishmen are of this period, and so are those last and most loved heroes of the old régime, D'Artagnan and his friends, and Monte Cristo.

Despite the splendor of these romances, reality would not be denied. Balzac gave it his allegiance; Disraeli his.

**The  
Realistic  
Period**            The signs of the times might have been read as early as 1821 in the reception of that puerile work already mentioned, Egan's "Life in London." In this, Corinthian Tom escorts his country cousin Jerry through the various resorts of London, accompanied by Bob Logic, the Oxonian. One disreputable place after another is described, with what the heroes saw and did there, the scene usually degenerating into a drunken orgy.

It is noteworthy that in this very popular book the plea is persistently advanced that the "study of character" is a most valuable training and occupation; and the wanderings of Tom and Jerry are all nominally undertaken with this object in view. The book was accepted by the young bloods of the day as their true biography, and they delighted in its puns and slang. Numerous imitations and dramatizations of it followed. The purposeless obscenity of the tale is very offensive to modern taste; but we find Thackeray recalling the book with affection; and it started the school of "pictures of real life," which led to "Pickwick Papers."

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

Dickens and Thackeray, though not the beginners of the great novelistic reaction against the ideal, became its most notable upholders. Later critics have declared Dickens' figures to be as unreal as Monte Cristo. But this does not remove him from among the teachers of realism. His characters are at least intended to be real; and they were accepted as such by their own day. Your true devotee of Dickens will assert, even now, that underneath the exaggeration there lies always a core of truth. What I have said of Sterne, they would apply to Dickens: he conceived his characters in the spirit of burlesque, of caricature; but always, revealed beneath the jester's cloak, moves the human form. Others have denied this; they assert that Dickens' method consisted of so over-emphasizing one feature of a man that everything else disappears and a monstrosity is created, an empty form swayed only by its one excessive trait, and unmoved, uninfluenced, by all the world beside. According to this view, then, we have here only types, and not "overloaded with attributes" at that. To bring up the character of David Copperfield in appeal against this decision is unavailing; for Copperfield again, like Tom Jones and Evelina, is autobiographic.

In Thackeray's character pictures we reach obviously and immediately a far higher level. In the simpler, broader sense in which we have so far faced character Thackeray's figures are wholly human and complete. If subtler questions have arisen since his day, it is not impossible that the master may have given some of them their best solution without measuring them. The two more recent points of discussion on character technique are,

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first, the question as to whether the author can and must dissociate himself wholly from his own creations; second, the rather anatomical problem as to how far he can, and shall, dissect the inner workings of his figures without destroying their life.

This first problem is elaborately handled in Maupassant's celebrated preface to his "Pierre and Jean." Briefly stated, the theory is that the author's attitude toward his creatures must be wholly objective and external. Not only must he see them as beings quite detached from himself and strangers to his views, he must avoid all sympathy with them, must give them neither love nor hate, approval nor disapproval; because, the moment he does so, he becomes partial, he prejudices our judgment.

With the first portion of this demand Thackeray certainly complies. Do you remember him in "De Finibus" describing himself as writing in the gray of the evening, picturing a character so vividly to himself? At length he looks "rather wistfully up from the paper with perhaps ever so little fancy that HE MAY COME IN." With regard to the further demand, lack of feeling for his characters, avoidance of approval or disapproval, Thackeray never complied—and let us add, in parenthesis, it would have been a sad loss to literature if he had.

The second problem, the introduction of vivisection, of scientific psychology, into fiction, arose with George Eliot, or let us say with her later works.

### **The Psychological Novel**

These are told only as character studies. They display human beings developing

before our eyes through life's experiences. And this development is insistently the author's

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

theme, or rather, not the development itself, but the causes of it, the method, the "mechanics of the human mind." Indeed, as has been already suggested, it is always the mind that interests George Eliot, not the heart; the intellect, not the feelings. Her characters, with the possible exception of Maggie Tulliver—again the autobiographic figure—develop by thinking, and both she and they are always discussing this thinking, and telling why and how they think they think. The reading of her later works is scarce to be classed among the pleasures of life; it is one of the duties; there is so much in them to learn. We approach them as scientific studies, as an effort, a *tour de force*.

Following her lead, the novel took a distinctly psychologic turn, though her followers have tried to improve upon her, most of them by giving emotion a larger share in their analyses.<sup>1</sup> In this field, work the authors who declare that plot is no longer an important factor in the novel; but George Eliot herself was very careful as to plot. The point is worth noting. In her earlier works this great teacher presented plots perfect and compact. Her later works are very discursive; but the plot is always existent, consecutive and cumulative. Most analytic authors admit the wisdom of this, and whether for

<sup>1</sup>This remark though based on the statements of such careful students as Thomas Hardy and Mr. Brownell must not be taken as implying that George Eliot created literary psychology. It only expresses the general feeling that she was an originator and leader. Professor Cross has pointed out the genesis of the psychological novel in Mrs. Gaskell. In France at a far earlier date we have that interesting phenomenon, Stendhal. But neither Stendhal nor Mrs. Gaskell had an immediate influence in introducing psychological analysis into the general technique of the novel.

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their own or the public's sake, continue to seek, if they do not always find, interest from incident and story.

The "character plot" has become the favorite form of the serious literary novel. Most of the noted writers of recent years, Turgenev and Tolstoi in Russia, James and Howells in America, Meredith and Hardy in England, Zola and Bourget in France, Bjørnsen and Sudermann in the north, Valdes and D'Annunzio in the south, have dealt in character studies and subtleties. Most of the critics approve this style of novel, and the authors praise one another with grave seriousness. But they have never had wholly to themselves the novel-writing field. There have always been writers to declare all this introspection beyond the province of the novel, and beyond its power. Action has still its advocates. Indeed, there has been something very like a reaction among the younger generation. To such writers as Stevenson and Kipling the story is again the important thing. To them man's best interpretation seems to lie in his outward work. His truest portrait is the deed that he has done.

Perhaps most of us ordinary folk would be willing to take our median stand with Charles Dudley Warner when he says in his essay on "Modern Fiction," "The sacrifice of action to some extent to psychological evolution in modern fiction may be an advance in the art as an intellectual entertainment, if the writer does not make that evolution his end, and does not forget that the indispensable thing in a novel is the story. The novel of mere adventure or mere plot, it need not be urged, is of a lower order than that in which the evolution of characters

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and their interaction make the story. The highest fiction is that which embodies both; that is, the story in which action is the result of mental and spiritual forces in play." In this, by the inclusion of the words "spiritual forces," we may again recognize our previous demand for a three-fold plot, of action, of developing character, and of increasing emotion.

## CHAPTER V

### EMOTION

**Importance of Emotion**      "The novel has made its way in a large measure by an assertion of the superiority of that which is apparently a weaker and a lesser part of life, namely, emotion. For the novel does not stand in literary history as a record of achievement. It stands as a record of emotion. . . . It asserts that the emotional period in life is the great period of life." This view of the essential attitude of the novel, expressed by Mr. Stoddard in his "Evolution of the English Novel," is widely held. The extreme realists have indeed protested against this prominence of emotion or passion as false to the truth of life. They demand, as M. Bourget phrases it, "mediocrity of heroes, systematic diminution of plot, and almost total suppression of dramatic action." Other critics have grouped passion as a single minor element of character. But in general its overshadowing importance and essentially extraneous impulse, upon the novel as upon life, have been strongly felt. Balzac in "Père Goriot" speaks of "the transforming power of an overmastering emotion," and explains his meaning by adding: "Sometimes the dullest spirit, under the stimulus of passion, reaches to such eloquence of thought if not of tongue that it seems to breathe in a celestial ether."

Lord Lytton, an abler critic of others than of himself,

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declares in his introduction to "Pompeii" that in the novel everything else must be "subordinate to the vital elements of interest, viz., plot, character and passion." And again, after expressing the hope that his book may be a faithful portrait of its times, he continues, "May it be (what is far more important) a just representation of the human passions and the human heart."

If we regard the novel in this light, as a "study of the human heart," the "portrayal of a passion," the story of some emotional upheaval with causes and effects, in that case we must seek its origin in France, the land of emotion; and we shall agree with Frenchmen in saying that the first modern novel was Madame Lafayette's "Princess of Cleves." This as we have seen (Chapter VI, Part I) is clearly the story of a passion, a feeble passion, if you will, but genuinely felt by author and by reader, and hence widely different from the conventional assertions of overwhelming emotion which make the chivalric tales such pleasant reading for the humorist.

Yet despite Madame Lafayette's pointing of the road, the aristocratic romancers of France continued to misrepresent passion. While centring attention, as they had long done, on the single passion of love, they merely dallied with it in courtly dilettante fashion, playing at the game, making models and maps of love's country. They shrank from entrance into passion's real domain, from touching passion's heart of fire, or facing its sometime ugliness.

Not until the time of the Abbé Prévost was emotion



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again approached with any real conviction or sincerity. In his master work, "Manon Lescaut," we have a true, a startling picture of a real, human, physical love, and the excesses to which it leads. Moreover, breaking flatly from the sentimentality of the day, Prévost makes the hero recover his common sense after his mistress' death. The madness fades from his heart; and, restored to ordinary life, he seeks Paris and his friends. As studies of character, the chevalier and his mistress leave much to be desired; as studies of passion, they are tragically true.

"Manon Lescaut" appears to have been first published at Amsterdam in 1733; but there is no evidence that when, in 1739, Richardson began "Pamela," he was familiar with Prévost's work. Nor does he follow along its lines. Passions exist in "Pamela"; but as compared with those in Prévost they

"Are as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine."

In fact here at the very beginning of French and English novels one encounters a racial distinction. The Englishman fights passion as a foe; the Frenchman clasps it as an inspiration. The Anglo-Saxon seeks to be, and to remain, his own self rather than aught else in all the universes; the man of Romance race eagerly merges his self in the greater, broader, unmeasurable "Beyond." Hence the English novel places character above passion; the French reverses this. Consider this even in "Jane Eyre," quoted by Englishmen as the type of passion, extreme and uncontrolled. Even there we find "principle" so fixed in the heroine's mind that on learning of the

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existence of her lover's wife, she leaves him. In one of the truest bits of English fiction, she admits the longing, the temptation, to continue by his side; yet she goes out into another life. What she is, dominates what she desires. The self, the mass of ideas, impressions, and opinions, inherited and absorbed, is stronger than the new element, the passion. Only the ultimate kindness of the novelist in killing off the undesired wife, enables Jane Eyre to bend her will into harmony with her wish.

Returning to consider the use of passion, or let us substitute the milder word, emotion, in "Pamela," the book, as we have already noted, is a study, a marvellously true study, of a woman. In woman, at least so far as mere man, speaking with all humility, has been able to judge of her, character

**Richardson's  
Creation of  
the Emotional  
Cult**

is less positive than in her helpmate. That is, she is more fluid; the fixed, the formal, the solid part of her is less. She is more the creature of the mood, the moment, the inspiration, the emotion. Hence, if Richardson was to portray woman truthfully, it was inevitable that emotion should be much in evidence. Pamela's character, indeed, is fixed for us from the start. She is a "Good Girl"; to that she will hold throughout, with true British solidity. But over the surface of this one immovable fact, flows a most marvellous play of emotion, varied, sparkling, poetic, true. It gives, to modern eyes, the one lasting value of the book. Passion of a stronger type is suggested in Pamela's master, Mr. B.; but he is seen so wholly through Pamela's eyes, is so vague and feminine a figure in his doubts and changes and hesi-

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tations, that a reader gets no firm grasp of him, no confident understanding.

In Richardson's later works emotion is handled with the same sureness and delicacy. It is also given a far larger influence over life. Yet it is notable that, in "Grandison," desiring to depict the hero's first love, Clementina, as wholly under the control of passion, he felt it necessary to deny her English blood. In that delightfully characteristic blunder of his, he even denies her human nature altogether. He divides his figures into three lists, as men, women, and Italians. x

It is this emotional quality of Richardson's work that explains the peculiar nature of his fame. This was greater abroad than at home. Continental Europe, and especially France, hailed him as the genius of the age. Diderot, the leading scholar and man of letters of the time, ranked Richardson by the side of Euripides and Homer. De Musset places "Clarissa" highest among all the novels of the world. The first chorus of Gallic enthusiasm found no dissentient voice. Even France's own son, Marivaux, who had preceded Richardson and who as an analyst of woman's heart is close akin to him, was rejected from comparison. He was dismissed with Prévost and Madame Lafayette as being wholly inferior.

✓ Homer had created the epic, had been the voice of the body, of Nature, speaking the frank full joy in life. Euripides, the master of the drama, had given voice to the soul in its stern conflict against life. Richardson, in establishing the novel, found a voice for the heart, with all its changing moods toward life, its hesitant ebb and flow. 2

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The women of England felt the power of Richardson, as we have seen; and if their praise of their idol was less discriminating than that of France, it was equally enthusiastic. But among the men of England there arose a sturdy and characteristic rebellion against this portrayal of the world as centred on emotion. The creator of Pamela and Mr. B. was ridiculed as sentimental, a teacher of false sentiment and false morality. Emotion, declared his assailants, existed of course, but it was a minor thing of little influence and of little consequence when compared to character. Character was the true dominant force over life, of which Richardson's pictures gave only a maudlin, hysterical misconception. This attack upon the self-complacent printer still continues. Even to-day there are not lacking British critics of high ability who stand wholly true to their race and sex, and, firmly denying existence to everything they are unable to see, find only amaze, suspicion or contempt for all past and present admirers of Richardson.

It was in Fielding's writings that this protest received its first clear voice. And certainly life, or at least so much of life as reveals itself to most of us in personal experience, finds a simpler, saner echo in Fielding's work. Emotion, even passion, is there depicted, but as a temporary impulse. It rises, and it passes; and the man goes on. Usually it is a mere "flash in the pan," Molly Seagrim charging against the whole village in the churchyard, Tom Jones in his grief at the loss of Allworthy's affection extravagantly tossing everything away from him, even the note for £500 upon which his entire future

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depends. Indeed, in such an incident as this, or in Tom's weeping repentance and reform in the jail, passion may possibly be accused of an hysteria to which it never mounts in Richardson. The staunchest adherents of Fielding find themselves compelled to explain that his was an emotional age.

Looking to the general dominance of passion, such as the love and desire and despair which sweeps from end to end through "Clarissa Harlowe," this is absent in Fielding. Indeed it is directly and deliberately negated. Jones loves his Sophia, we are told; yet on losing her he rushes immediately into a new life, and has an incongruously good time both on the road to London and after his arrival. The later reversal of his fortunes and his wedding to Sophia do not come to the reader with any of that sense of finality, of a story closed and completed, such as is felt with Richardson.<sup>1</sup> To Jones the affairs of the story are only incidents; "the man goes on." Indeed, a parodist of the day feeling this, and feeling also the untrustworthy mechanism of Fielding's plot, wrote a continuation. In this, after Allworthy's death, the de-

<sup>1</sup>I would not push this point too far. It is a curious fact in the development of these two masters, that Richardson in "Pamela," his earliest work, shows no recognition of the true closing point of his story but wanders on and on. Only by his endless iteration are we convinced, if convinced at all, that the story is really complete, that Mr. B. remained converted and refrained from giving Pamela a most tempestuous future. On the other hand in Fielding's very early work, "Jonathan Wild," which probably antedated even "Joseph Andrews" in composition, we have a tragedy pursued with savage scorn to its relentless end. Richardson moved onward to dramatic completeness of form; Fielding, starting there, gave to his later work something of that air of incompleteness which a recent school of novelists has maintained to be essential for truth to life.

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feated and wicked nephew Blifil sues Tom for his inheritance, and, by easily winning the case at law, reopens to the hero the life of adventure.

Among the novelists who immediately followed the two great originators, one sees markedly the influence of both sex and race. In England most of the women writers dealt mainly with emotion, the men with character and incident. Smollett, with his cold spirit, gives emotion even lesser place than Fielding. Only in his weakest book, "Count Fathom," can it be positively said to exist at all. Johnson while admiring even to excess the feeling in Richardson—"there is more knowledge of the human heart in one letter of Richardson's than in all 'Tom Jones'"—failed wholly to express similar feeling in "Rasselas."

Meanwhile, on the continent of Europe, the greatest writers seized on Richardson's design. Goethe's "Werther" may almost be accepted as the type form of the emotional novel. It is entirely and emphatically "the story of a passion." As such it was caught up by the youth of the world. The spirit of romanticism found here its fullest vent. The devotees of Werther declared passion to be infinitely above life; and the most enthusiastic among them, in impassioned imitation of Werther, killed themselves merely to prove their point. Goethe himself outlived the extravagance of his early novel; but following his early mood there arose that whole wonderful school of German romanticists. These men contemptuously rejected ordinary life in the search for emotion, for larger passions and more sublime delights

**European  
Exaggeration of  
Emotion**

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than modern civilization could offer them. Fouqué dreamed of Undine, the water-sprite whose life, whose very soul, depended on love. He pictured Sintram, thrown into actual physical conflict with man's two "companions," Death and the Devil, fighting the fiend on the field of battle, and conquering him amid the clash of armies. Through unnumbered tales, runs the mystical search for the "blue flower" of perfect joy. Or there is Hoffmann's masterpiece of the "Golden Pot," wherein are nonsense, enchantment, beauty, power and imagination, heaped up in overwhelming profusion, with a side glance of scorn at common men. A number of clerks are derisively pictured as shut up in a row in crystal bottles, barred forever from free life and the free air of heaven, yet stolidly plodding away at their ledgers, quite unconscious of their imprisonment.

In France, at an even earlier date than Goethe, came Rousseau. His "Heloise" and "Emile" may be, they are, poor novels and false teachers of life. Yet they are great books despite their confusion and their folly. Following the lead of Richardson, they gave vent to emotion. They unchained sentiment; and sentiment finding itself in sudden freedom, uncontrolled, unknowing its own need, its own domain, rushed into every imaginable excess. Emotion, the exaggeration of emotion, long proved in France the chief foe to the real progress of the novel. René, the morbid hero of Châteaubriand, may be taken as the French Werther, only eaten up by egoism and lacking strength for suicide.

In England, the emotional novel never reached such extravagance. The "lady novelists" who imitated Richard-

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son in their hounding of a persecuted heroine, did indeed run into emotional excess; but they kept some bound upon their folly. They even made an effort to keep in touch with actual life, as in Mrs. Brunton's "Self-Control," or the so-called American novel "Charlotte Temple" by Mrs. Rowson, whose plot is taken from real life, and the grave of whose heroine was long pointed out in an American churchyard.<sup>1</sup>

Even the English "romantic novel" itself, the tale of Gothic mystery which began with "Otranto," did not deal primarily with the emotions of its characters, but with those of its readers. There is very little real emotion in "Otranto." The ghosts are intended to make the reader fear; actual spectators of their visitations accept them with an admirable philosophic calm. Only under Mrs. Radcliffe's guidance did the sentimental heroine of horrors learn to exhibit a proper state of emotional distress. Maturin, a later master of this school, deliberately abandoned love as the central passion of his tales, argued against it as being seldom an extreme emotion, and expressed his intent "to found the interest of a romance on the passion of supernatural fear, and on

<sup>1</sup>It is interesting to note how in "Charlotte Temple" the actuality of the plot restrained Mrs. Rowson in imitating the sentimental and emotional extravagance of her contemporaries. She alters the real names of every one except the heroine, and so is enabled to decorate her male figures with such beautiful appellations as Montraville and Belcour. But the hero is distinctly imperfect, and the heroine, although betrayed and ruined, fails to go mad or die of despair. She lives with her betrayer until he wearies of her and then she prepares to return home, but dies, as it were, by accident. Neither the villain nor the semi-villainous hero slays himself from remorse. One forgets Charlotte in wooing a country maid; the other marries and is left in comfort.



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that almost alone." This he argues is the only passion really universal and uncontrollable.

These works were but eddies in the stream of fiction. Its true current swept onward through the work of Miss Burney, whose good spirits and simple truthfulness prevented her from following passion into rhodomontade. Her

### The Reaction

Evelina has indeed a most uncomfortable tendency to faint on every possible occasion, a difficulty which in our harder-headed day would be attributed to bodily anæmia, calling for the instant care of a physician, but in that sentimental age was understood to be merely a poetic tribute to the overwhelming surge of feminine emotion. Barring this single concession to convention, Evelina is a robust, hearty, high-spirited young girl, an honor to her creator and her race. Her experiences and her story are not such as to rouse special emotional depths within her, nor does Miss Burney herself seem to know of the existence of these.

If Miss Burney reduced emotion to her own height, Miss Edgeworth, a deeper nature and a greater artist, declared against passion altogether, with stern moral disapproval. The task she designedly set herself was, to teach young ladies that they exaggerated their emotional side, that love like every other excitement not only should but easily could be conquered, if the effort were made. The young ladies of all Europe had by this date learned, through three generations of novel reading, that blighted affection ought to cause an early death, or at least an utter loss of interest in life; and many a naturally healthy, merry lass did her simple best to live

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up to this ideal. Miss Edgeworth tried to restore her sex to common sense. Looking only at her heroines, one is tempted to say she swung the balance too far, and herself became incapable of recognizing real strength of passion. She came, however, of an emotional race, and in her pictures of Irish life, in "Castle Rackrent" especially, there is not only tense emotion in the writer, but also a tragic recognition of its power over her countrymen. So also in her *Lady Delacour* in "Belinda," she has given us a keen, heartfelt picture of emotion playing havoc with two lives.

Jane Austen's attitude toward passion comes as near to actual denial of its existence as so great an artist could approach. She is non-committal, ready perhaps to grant its possibility; but as it has never come within her purview, she excludes it from her perfect reproduction of the life she knew. As for the false passion and exaggerated sensibility of most novels of the day, she greets them with inextinguishable ridicule. Nay, so far does she carry her defiance that in "*Northanger Abbey*" she explains that her hero knew in advance how much the novel-reading heroine was devoted to him, and that the feeble responsive feeling in his mind was roused chiefly by gratitude and by the pleasure which he took in the lady's admiration. Surely never was passion so belittled and deliberately turned out of doors. The picture is as true to practical life and the probabilities of the situation, as it is undramatic and unnecessary.

Scott's broader view of existence rehabilitated passion, almost reënthroned it, mightier than before. He rescued portrait painting equally from the hectic fires of

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Mrs. Radcliffe and the barren cold of Miss Austen. Passion is always the mainspring of his central figures. One is even tempted to suggest that he dealt with them emotionally to escape the more exacting task of studying their characters. In his historical figures and some of his Scotch folk he has shown how keenly he could analyze and realize a human being, when he would. He has imposed his Louis XI upon history, and so, almost, his Leicester and his James the First, his Cœur de Lion and his Saladin.

In glancing thus far over our field it has seemed unnecessary to point the obvious remark that emotion

**The Union of Emotion and Verisimilitude** tended to connect itself with the presentation of idealized truth, while close portrayal of the actual led usually to study of character and manners. In

Balzac arose the first great writer to combine passion with careful actuality. Never since his day and that of Bulwer have the two been wholly apart. The absurdities of earlier romance are unthinkable to the decades that follow. Even Dumas created only a single unhuman monster, Milady in the "Three Musketeers."

Balzac certainly stands out as a striking figure in the novel's history. He has had many followers; he had no predecessors. Before his time the French novel was, as we have pointed out, almost wholly autobiographical, the result as in Rousseau and Châteaubriand of affectionate self-study, with morbid revivifying and revealing of unhealthful emotions. Balzac's work is objective. His characters stand wholly outside himself. They are largely swayed by emotion, because their creator saw

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emotion as a mighty factor in life; but their passions are their own, not his, the passions of the day; and these are analyzed, not with sickly admiration, but with thoughtful recognition of both their value and their weakness.

Balzac's greatness was only slowly recognized in France. His contemporaries continued to deal chiefly with romance and exaggerated emotion. Even George Sand, who perhaps in this respect came nearest to Balzac at the time, confesses she is often carried away by love of the romantic, though striving to escape disaster by a middle course between the dull "lake" of analysis, and the reckless "torrent" of passion. Mérimée also was afraid of emotion, suspicious of it; yet he employed it to the full. Gautier might ridicule the blunders of the romanticists, but he had no substitute to offer for passion in preserving interest. The extreme reaction of the French novel against its emotional debauch does not find expression until the publication of Flaubert's "Madame Bovary" in 1856.

This remarkable work is a deliberate attack upon novels as Flaubert knew them. He depicts a woman saturated with the sentimental ideas inculcated by them, seeking to find in life the "felicity" and "passion" and "intoxication" to which they so beautifully refer. Her life by the side of a commonplace husband becomes unendurable to her. She seeks for love and lovers, but only finds other ordinary men, who take all she can give and then despise her. They play the game as they understand it, but not according to her novelistic rules. She drifts on into disgust, despair, and suicide. The

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stern, offensive, truthful picture came like a blow upon French writers; its influence has never been forgotten.

In England meanwhile, romance had escaped the lower passions; it had dealt rather with adventure and excitement, and avoided the sounding of emotional deeps. Its sentiment remained idealistic, not hedonistic. If we ignore the scribblers who divorced their romances wholly from verisimilitude, Dickens pushed the emotional appeal farther than any previous English writer since Richardson. His great scenes, his climaxes, are always emotional, and he must have considerably raised the price of pocket handkerchiefs in Britain. It was this that constituted his chief hold on his enormous public. To untrained ears at least, his sentiment "rang true." Whether it was really so, there has been much dispute; but it is probable that no single tragedy in actual life ever caused such widespread weeping as did the death of Little Nell, over which the noted critic Lord Jeffrey was found "sobbing terribly." Of course we must discriminate between the depiction of emotion as swaying a character, and the arousal of emotion in a reader by means of pathetic scenes. But the two are seldom far apart; and in Dickens especially the characters are filled with emotion, just because he himself was so filled; and characters and author unite to play upon the reader's heartstrings. Tolstoi said of Dickens that his chief claim to fame lay in his feeling for the underlying divinity in all common and humble lives. Dickens tells us that he himself could not sleep for nights through thinking of Little Nell. To a friend he wrote, "I am breaking my heart over this story and can not bear to finish it." If ever the English

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people were in danger of being carried away by sentiment and having an entire national *bouleversement* of character, it was when they yielded themselves to the magic craft of Dickens.

In this single respect then, Dickens may well be compared to Richardson; and the antithesis seen in Dickens and Thackeray has often been balanced against that in Richardson and Fielding. The difference between the two later masters, however, was never of such divergence nor of such elemental character as in the older case. Fielding could not possibly appreciate Richardson; he mocked him as an author and despised him as a man. Thackeray treasured many of the works of Dickens, and praised them heartily for both their pathos and their humor.

As to Thackeray's own treatment of emotion, it agrees with Fielding's, or perhaps one might better say with Balzac's. He deals with passion as he has found it in the world. The cosmos which he has created, is an English cosmos, and therefore less interpenetrated with fire than that of Balzac. His Amelia Sedley is a creature of emotion throughout; but Becky Sharp holds herself well in check with little difficulty. Her husband Rawdon Crawley may serve for contrast with Tom Jones. Rawdon is not the hero of the book, but a minor figure rather contemptuously treated; yet emotionally he does not balance unfavorably with Jones. Like Jones he has his rather weepy times of sentiment, and his one passionate outburst; but his passion is better justified than that of Fielding's hero, and its effect more lasting. Indeed most of Thackeray's climaxes are emotional, though treated

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with greater restraint than among earlier authors. So also with his closings. Colonel Esmond lays down his pen with a burst of impassioned praise of love as "the highest faculty of the soul." Pendennis ends by assuring us of the depths of a wife's affection, tells us that his friend Warrington survived a deep heart sickness, and adds a cautionary aside—"That malady is never fatal to a sound organ." In brief Thackeray's own day compared him with Dickens, and called him cynical; our later critics compare him with life, and sometimes call him sentimental.

It was into this London of Dickens and Thackeray that in 1847 the Brontës interjected their remarkable work. The effect was tremendous. Manners had changed widely in the century since Fielding and Smollett. Authors of the later age still talked of the "Passions," to be sure; but these were treated distantly, as a family of very slight acquaintance, and hardly respectable at that. One saluted them doubtfully, with gloved hands, so to speak, especially those that dealt of sex. "Ah, Miss Love, you look charming to-day. What? You are not Love but Vanity? Pray, pardon my stupid blunder; this then is Miss Love? No, Jealousy? How foolish of me! And this you say is Miss Lust? No, miss, excuse me, I am quite sure *we* have never met." Even Thackeray drew a veil over much that Becky Sharp must have seen and felt. It is shown only in its consequences.

Into this "decent" world there suddenly stepped forward three young women, women mind you, speaking of

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the passions as closest intimates, dealing with them fully and frankly as each in her own life had found them to exist. In Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights" there is no idealizing of emotions as in Radcliffe and Scott, no poetizing them as in Rousseau and Châteaubriand, no reticence about them as in Thackeray; they are depicted as Emily Brontë knew them, ugly and tempestuous, crude and close of kin to earth and to its brutes.

The work of Charlotte, the eldest and commonly accounted the greatest of the three Brontë sisters, approaches passion with the same fullness, frankness and freedom. But in Charlotte's stronger mind passion was never divorced from its diviner soul. The glow of romance never deserted it. Where her sister saw a beast, she saw an earth-bound god. Hence it was Charlotte's work, it was "Jane Eyre," that mainly influenced the world, that pointed out the true value of emotion as the central, the vivifying force within the novel. A novel without emotion is not a novel, but a mere essay upon character.

This fact, accepted in England after the Brontë upheaval, has received fairly general recognition ever since. The name of Trollope naturally occurs to one as the author of the generation of the fifties who gives passion smallest place. Yet even in Trollope each tale centres around some love or some regret, some waxing or some waning fire, some force extraneous to character and playing upon it, bringing development from without.

Hawthorne in America taught passion the lesson of restrained expression, showed it how to avoid extrava-



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gance and yet be strong. George Eliot and her followers endeavored to study and analyze emotion, to understand instead of feeling it. A later school of authors, even more relentless in their devotion to science, have insisted on explaining emotion away altogether, reducing it to an expression of character, a matter of nerve ganglia and digestion, a thing not elemental and common to all the race, but unique in each of us, impossible to some, having its origin in the peculiarities of the individual. X

Whether this be true or no, need not specially concern the present generation. If the idea that emotion can be positively predicted and mathematically measured by character, be ever established as a scientific fact, we shall all cease reading the novels that explained it, and study the truth and the demonstration more compactly in works on psychology. For the present there is every sign that the public will long continue to read itself into its stories, and will buy novels for the spell they exercise on the emotions, instead of seeking that spell in a direct assault upon the nervous ganglia.

## CHAPTER VI

### BACKGROUND

**Varying  
Use of  
Background**

I know of no critic who has yet come forward to assert flatly that the background is the chief essential of a novel. Attention has, however, been called by Professor Perry to the fact that two authors so widely differing as Stevenson and Eliot both record that their stories sometimes had origin in the conception of a background or setting. Into this scene they would afterward insert characters, and around them build up a story, to express the mood or picture that had first impressed them. Also, in this connection, comes to mind the early novelists' oft-repeated assertion that their books were intended to give "pictures of life," a phrase which may be interpreted in many ways, but which sometimes at least meant plainly that their principal efforts were directed neither to the story nor the characters, but to the scenes described. How else, for instance, shall one interpret Smollett's much-quoted statement that he considers a novel "a large, diffused picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groups and exhibited in various attitudes"? He goes on to explain that these groups are to have a unifying purpose or plan; but in his own actual work the groups or scenes remain always the chief concern.

So also our modern day swarms with archæological novels and tales of travel, wherein the scene, the thing

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described, stands obviously superior to the usually thin string of adventure or thinner love affair. Or, on a far higher plane, there are Hugo's "Les Miserables" and many of Zola's works, especially that stupendous "Débâcle." In these there is still some shadow of a story, and human figures are sharply sketched; but the whole is cast against some gigantic, overwhelming background of phantasmagorical life. Hugo's earlier book has been aptly said to be the story of Notre Dame itself. The great cathedral towers above all else as chief centre of the tale, not the unreal, pitiful little gypsy lass, still less the hunchback, or the frenzied monk. The scene, the background, becomes the foreground. "Les Miserables" is not the story of Jean Valjean, nor of Marius, nor Cosette, nor any one of the tragic figures which flash across its pages. It is the story of Human Misery—just as "La Débâcle" is the story of France's downfall in 1870. The vast brooding shadow, the black background which surrounds the little people of the tale, engulfs them, and they disappear. Only the blackness stays. Genius has given substance to a shadow, personified an abstraction; and the reader grows so rapt in the mystic vision, that he feels for the vague "world woe" all the sympathy, all the emotion, with which he might stoop to a suffering fellow-mortal.

The term background, therefore, appears a very elastic one. In its strictest sense it applies only to the physical surroundings, the room or landscape, the stage upon which events occur. In connection with the novel the word is commonly employed in a wider artistic meaning, as covering everything that helps to make clear the life

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surrounding the central figures, the field of existence wherein their action occurs, the "atmosphere." In this broader view every touch which helps to reveal or to impress the environment is background. The cry of the huckster in the street, the heaving of a huge ocean wave in storm, the interpolated soliloquy of the author, even the pictures of minor characters, the conversations which they carry on, the lives they live, each and all of these may aid in bodying forth the life and mind of some central figure.

There is also a third and cruder use of the technical term background which makes it cover everything in a novel that is neither direct portraiture nor action. In this sense not only the touches we have already mentioned, but all accompaniments, no matter what the cause of their addition, all divergences, no matter whither they may lead astray, are charitably accepted as belonging to the tale to which they come chance-tied, and are called background.

If the word is accepted in this loosest sense, background has found a place in fiction ever since Egyptian days, and generally speaking has been fiction's bane, the curse entailed upon it by its freedom of form. This has been shown with perhaps sufficient fullness in our examination of early fiction. A Greek romancer would deliberately put aside his story while he displayed his rhetorical ability in the description of a storm at sea or of a series of pictures on the walls of a temple. So, too, the romancers of chivalry, having constructed an ornate and beautifully flowered speech, cared little where they delayed their tale to insert it. The tournament and all the

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court hold pause while Amadis orates privately at Oriana. Knights, while they bleed to death, deliver addresses which would tax not only the rhetorical skill, but the stentorian lungs of a modern orator. The euphuistic tales of England consist chiefly of this sort of background, either of speeches or of meditations, as consider, for instance, that "Rosalynde" which Shakespeare rescued from Thomas Lodge and oblivion by the simple expedient of cutting away four fifths of the excrescences.

If background be restricted in name to its true value of emphasizing such of the necessary environment as is unknown or apt to be overlooked, in this

### **Lack of True Background in Early Fiction**

better sense background does not exist in early fiction. Even in the "Decameron" there is no such effective handling

of surroundings as modern writers offer. Boccaccio's characters appear almost wholly, as critics phrase it, *in vacuo*. A high artistic instinct held the author so closely to his tale that little else is visible; his people are outlined against empty air. If a reader knows his Florence of the fourteenth century, he can project Boccaccio's figures against it, see them stealing through its tortuous, shadowed streets or basking in its fragrant, sun-kissed gardens. But it scarce occurred to the writer to help portray scenes which he took it for granted all his readers knew by heart. Even when he placed his puppets in foreign regions he seldom paused for description. There is a suggestion of opulence when he speaks of Eastern lands, as in the palace of Mitridanes with its thirty-two arched gates of entrance; there are the great perfumed baths and other splendors of the courtesans of

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Palermo. But generally speaking it was quite impossible for mediæval writers to employ background in our modern way, because they had first to develop the historic sense, the traveller's sense.

This sense consists in the recognition that we do not live as our ancestors did, nor as our neighbors, sometimes even our nearest neighbors, do; that manners and customs vary widely with time, with clime, and even with social position; that externally at least our lives are almost infinitely varied; and that these externals react with compelling force upon our inner selves. As a natural corollary it follows that an author, seeking to make us understand and follow certain human beings, must supply us with any important surroundings that we are likely to misconceive. The familiar part of the background he may leave out, as also the unessential. But whatever is at once essential and unfamiliar, or whatever we would not ourselves supply with sufficient vividness, that he must reproduce.

Boccaccio knew only of one life, the one lived by the Italian aristocracy of his day. Beyond he saw nothing to portray. So, too, in the tales of chivalry, to whatever distant lands a knight might wander, to the tropics or the frozen north, he passed through the same dark woods, saw the same build of castles, talked the same language. He jousted in tournaments in Palestine or in Ireland under the same rules as in France or Spain, meeting enemies who carried the same weapons as he, and thought the same identical thoughts of love and chivalry and superhuman nonsense. Even in the rogue stories, which give such vivid pictures of the real life of their time,

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it is assumed as matter of course that the reader knows the life and the land in their general outline. Only the odd individual pictures, peculiar characters, burlesqued scenes from within the household, only these are brought to his attention.

It is the general custom, however, to trace to these picaresque tales the use of background in the novel. Indeed, in the sense which I have previously suggested, that of being disconnected scenes from life, the picaresque tales are all background, pictures dumbly waiting for some human passion to thrill through and vivify and unite them. Landscape also seemed slowly being prepared for use in the modern novel. Its pictures run through all the pastorals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but are treated superficially, as if all vales and streams and meadows were as one, to be summoned forth in the vaguely suggestive language of fancy and of poesie, rather than with the definiteness and direct purpose of prose.

In the eighteenth century novel, the slow growth of the sense of the vast variety of human life, with the consequent necessity and numerous different uses of background, is very interesting to trace. Madame Lafayette's heroine in the "Princess of Cleves" is portrayed amid an elaborately detailed environment of court intrigue, which gives strongly the sense of the artificiality and conventionality of life as known to the heroine. But this dazzling world is not depicted as influencing or molding the young princess. It constrains her daily actions, but never her character, which is presented as previously

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fully formed and fixed by her mother's training; never her emotions, which are copies of Madame Lafayette's own personal feelings; never her fate, which she herself decides. Historically the tale is given as happening over a century before the writer's time, but the manners, the thought, even the costumes, are of her own day.

In England much true sense of background and its value was developed by the essayists of Queen Anne's age. The character drawing of Sir Roger de Coverley depends very largely upon the country setting and the country neighbors. What would Sir Roger be without Will Wimble? How much is he vivified by the simple trust placed upon him by the innkeeper in the matter of the "Saracen's head"? Defoe, on the other hand, employed background not for character, but for verisimilitude. Far more strongly than the earlier picaresque wanderer do his heroes insist upon giving us detail. In Defoe this detail is often wholly commonplace, wholly uninteresting in itself; but how startlingly close it takes us into the life and confidence of the hero. We all know Crusoe, and we may know Colonel Jacque, Moll Flanders, the unnamed draper of the Plague, or even Bob Avery, Jonathan Wild or Captain Singleton, as we know few other people in or out of books. Of background in its romantic sense, the use of landscape and description, Defoe had no conception whatsoever.

Richardson's background is of yet another type. In "Pamela" the servants and other supernumeraries surrounding the heroine are introduced, apparently, only that they may talk to her. They threaten her, and are abashed by her tremendous purity; or they admire and praise her



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to her face—at least she says they do—with a fullness and unblushing enthusiasm, which she retails quite as fully and unblushingly. One thus gets a remarkably complete idea, if not directly of the heroine, of the impression she made upon other folk, an impression the reader instinctively adopts likewise. The value of this effect is here very notable. The reader becomes, as it were, a neighbor of Pamela, at home amid the neighborhood gossip and influenced by it almost unconsciously, as in life.

In scenic description "Pamela" is lacking. The house of Mr. B. is never brought forward in fuller detail than as a Bedfordshire manor house. The secluded place to which the trusting maid is afterward carried receives a more effective though merely poetic description. "We entered the Court-yard of this handsome, large, old and lonely Mansion, that looks made for Solitude and Mischief, as I thought, by its Appearance, with all its brown nodding Horrors of lofty Elms and Pines about it." Though brief, this is the fullest descriptive passage in the story, and important for its "suggestiveness." The lonely Mansion with its nodding Pines stands as parent to all the future homes of "Horrors" wherein persecuted heroines were to find nature harmonizing with their own sorely tried emotions.

Fielding reveals a distinct personal feeling for landscape. He speaks sometimes with enthusiasm of hillside

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Science in  
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paths and wide-spreading views. He gives us a page-long description of Mr. Allworthy's demesne, a purely extrinsic painting, the details of which have

no connection with the story. He even has some poetic

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thought of using nature in harmony with the feelings of his characters. Or at least when that harmony exists he feels and expresses it.

In considering Fielding's use of minor characters, one scarcely feels justified in calling them part of his background at all. They are too fully outlined; they stand out as sharply as the principals. Unlike Richardson's shadowy servants in "Pamela," they are analyzed and explained and understood. The difference is fundamental. Richardson is telling the story of a passion, giving a picture of a human heart. The outer physical life is hardly noted as it passes by. Fielding tells a tale of intrigue, gives a broad picture of the actual, external world. Hence the hero is not the only figure seen; he is not necessarily even the central figure, as witness "Joseph Andrews." In Fielding's work each character, as he appears, stands for himself, is the temporary focus of a temporary scene. His actions are not intended to make us understand the hero, but to reveal himself. In other words, if the novel is to be a picture of human life in general rather than of a few closely connected individuals in particular, then the words background and foreground lose their application to it. Fielding is a traveller who, approaching object after object, examines each more or less minutely according as he finds it worth while. Richardson stands still, his thoughts all centred on a single view. The attitude marks the difference between the student and the poet, the scientist and the artist.

In Smollett this becomes even more apparent. Fielding's dramatic training made him cling to his plot,

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and thus his work retains a distinct unity, unusual in "pictures of life." Each character is shown in his relation to the plot, and that relation is emphasized as the reason for his introduction. But when, as in Smollett, the plot almost disappears along with the centralized artistic view, then the pictures of life become frankly heterogeneous. The background, if we choose still to call it such, becomes all there is to see. The novel is very close to disbanding into its pristine atoms of anecdote, character sketch, and scenic description.

### Background in the "Pictures of Life" Novel

In scenes purely descriptive Smollett often reaches a higher altitude than any of his predecessors. He deals with sea storms in a manner to recall the best of the Greek rhetoricians. Indeed, to modern taste he outdoes the ancients; Greek rhetoric lacks human feeling, while Smollett's tempests deal not only with the winds and waves, but with the one human soul standing lone amidst their fury, standing as Smollett himself had stood, defying death in every blast. The technical point is here important. It might almost be broadened into a general assertion that a description which stands by itself and ignores any human presence is ineffective. To be strong, a description must attach itself to a human being and give his impressions. Readers can then see with the character's eyes, accept his emotions as their own, and so live through the scene, almost as bodily participants.

As Smollett advanced in years his power of description increased with his other literary qualities, while his natural endowments, ingenuity, imagination, freshness of knowledge and of view, decreased. Hence, while "Sir

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Launcelot Greaves" has been called his poorest novel, it presents some of his finest scenic effects. And "Humphrey Clinker," his last work, which is scarce a novel at all in the element of plot, contains not only his best character work, but the most carefully outlined and effective background that had yet appeared in fiction. The story is of an English family travelling from town to town for pleasure and for health. They write letters to their friends, giving impressions of each new place. Now it is Matthew Bramble, the whimsical, hot-headed squire, who finds "nothing but disappointment at Bath," and sarcastically describes its "boasted improvements in architecture." Now it is his young niece, Lydia, who writes, "Bath is to me a new world—all is gaiety, good humor and diversion." Or again it is his sister's maid, who has "seen all the fine shows of Bath; the prades, the squires, and the circlis, the crashit, the hotogon, and Bloody Buildings and Harry King's row; and I have been twice in the bath with mistress, and n'ar a smoak upon our backs, hussy." Thus the same spot or incident is described from various standpoints, and while this gives excellent opportunity for emphasizing character by showing what appeals to each, it also displays each new town itself in changing outlook, enlivened always by the human view.

Professor Cross has called attention to the fact that in Smollett we have the earliest of those scenes of supernatural terror which dominate the Gothic romance. In the use of description, also, may Smollett be regarded as the ancestor of this form of fiction. However extrava-

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gant the romance of terror became in some respects, there can be no doubt that its use of landscape was an advance in art, almost a revelation. Therein to the artist lies the value of Horace Walpole's dilettante effort, "The Castle of Otranto." The morbid, hypersensitive æsthete felt strongly the need of sympathy between content and form, between emotions and their outward scenic surroundings. This point, which had been vaguely appreciated by Fielding, was hypercritically clear to Walpole. He wrote "Otranto," as he himself explains, partly in expression of his love of the remote. He delighted in old ruined castles and the mystery surrounding them. He was an antiquarian student, and gathered about him relics of old furniture and dress, personal things which renewed the personality of owners long departed. He summoned back those owners, and placing them in sombre castles, made them reënact the ghostly suggestions that lingered around their relics.

This sense of harmony was carried still further by Mrs. Radcliffe, who has indeed been somewhat loosely said to have introduced landscape into the novel. It existed, as I have pointed out, before; but only with her did it rise to its full height of importance, its full poetic value of sympathy with, and interpretation of, character and story. Thus in "Udolpho" the opening pages portray scenes of peace and idyllic happiness consonant with the youth and innocence of the heroine. As her mind becomes tempest-tossed, she is removed to gloomy landscapes. The villain's castle is perched among Alpine mountains, its roadway winds past beetling crags and howling torrents. It is almost a pity to suggest that any-

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thing so poetic as this, is on the other hand unconvincing and unreal. Events in life most unsympathetically refuse to follow the impulses of landscape. Moreover Mrs. Radcliffe's landscapes are constructed in the light of sentiment, instead of experience. Gentlemen who really dwell in ruined castles among secluded mountains, are much more apt to develop into strong lunged, loud and simple chamois hunters, than into silent, dark and secret malefactors.

The continental novel had turned to descriptions of nature even before Mrs. Radcliffe's work. Rousseau's "New Heloise" was the prototype of a thousand works in which natural scenery was ecstatically admired. Something in the line of the poetic harmonizing of scene and event, was also attempted. But mainly the continental use of nature took a subjective bent. The moody and meditative hero was presented as viewing all landscape through the medium of his own emotions. When he was sad, he would pluck you gloom from the sunniest hillside; or, being torpidly disgusted, he would find stagnation in the lightning. The use of nature for romantic and unreal effects could scarcely extend further than these impassioned efforts which, both in France and England, date from the close of the eighteenth century.

In the nineteenth century Scott, the poet turned novelist, the true and harmonious poet with an instinctive sense of values and proportions, arose to reduce extravagance within control, and direct scenery to its really subordinate position. As a poet, however, Scott considered scenery interesting enough to stand alone, and so he dwelt upon its beauties sometimes through entire pages, unrelieved

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by any human presence. His descriptions are undeniably tedious at times.

Full perfection of scenic effect was scarcely reached until Cooper appeared. Our "American Scott," the first great novelist of sea and wilderness, the passionate lover of wave and sky and wood, carried every reader away with him into an imaginary land of wonder, of beauty, and of mystery wherein it is good to have lived when one was young. Cooper offers us no characters but such as are false or flimsy; he tells no single tale that unites probability with interest; but he has made the American wilderness to live forever in the minds of men. His background was of the world he knew and loved.

In later days there has been little new to record in the employ of landscape. Hawthorne showed us the perfection of that poetical, symbolic use of scenery which the Gothic romance originated. Thomas Hardy recently, with a strange, half-pagan intensity, has insisted on the actual influence of landscape in molding the human character and influencing the passions. His work has made a marked impression upon our day.

Returning to consider the larger questions of background after Smollett, the English "novel of manners" is usually regarded as beginning with Miss Burney. The descriptive designation indicates the importance that background assumed in this new form. The manners and posturings of society were to be depicted. In Miss Burney's works these always remain a mere background, against which is projected the attractive central figure of the real and simple heroine. As both this back-

### **The Novel of Manners**

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ground and this foreground were new to the public, it is hard to determine to which of the novelties Miss Burney's remarkable fame was principally due.

So noted a critic as Mr. Traill ascribes her success emphatically to the "manners" she portrays; and he may easily be right. Yet to find a work given simply and solely to these "manners," or even dependent on them so largely as Smollett depended on his more varied "pictures of life," one must look far beyond Miss Burney's day. This particular source of her success certainly was not seized upon and sharply centralized by her contemporary rivals. Miss Edgeworth's novels of London life also employ the background of society, but keep it in subordination, while she deals chiefly with moral lessons and resisted passions. Miss Austen, the "novelist of manners" *par excellence*, has always her story to tell, and carefully keeps in the centre of vision a heroine, who has inner as well as outer qualities to be presented, has character even more than manners.

Thus the novel of manners, in those early days at least, took its title rather superficially from an element which, in most examples of the class, was subsidiary and perhaps accidental. If the name were confined to works which chose manners as their main study and frankly subordinated or neglected other points, then the first genuine work of the kind would be that already mentioned production of Egan, "Life in London." There at least "Society" offers itself unadorned. Plot, character, emotion, let us hope verisimilitude as well, are scornfully thrust out of doors.

"Life in London" carries us on to "Pickwick Papers,"



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which at first with equal frankness subordinated literature to business. It was started to supply text matter, background, for a series of illustrations of sporting life. Fortunately for literature if not for pictorial art, the illustrator died and left the scheme in the writer's hands. Dickens, promptly inverting the scheme, made the illustrations in their turn conform to the text and to the scenes of "manners." By degrees he added humor, character study, and at length a semblance of a plot. If ever novel "grew," it was this one, and if ever characters slowly shaped themselves from their background, dominated it, dismissed it, triumphed over it, they were Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller.

About this time there arose among English novelists another style of setting, which produced what has been called the political novel. This is a form in which the characters all talk politics, think, live, eat and sleep politics. The hero is either a Prime Minister or anxious to become one, and the fate of the nation is usually supposed to hang upon his measures. This form might of course be ranked under the general heading of the purpose novel, which has been already discussed. Only the importance of Disraeli, the originator of the political novel, and the continued vogue the form has enjoyed among English statesmen—chiefly of the amateur type—have led to its separation as a special form. What has been said of other purpose novels in their relation to verisimilitude, applies equally to it. If the political chatter remains background, it may be extremely effective as showing the atmosphere amid which some people live; if

### **Political and Theological Novels**

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

political doctrines are so strenuously advanced as to distort the more essential elements of the story, the work becomes an essay to be judged by the essay's laws.<sup>1</sup>

So, too, with the theological novel, which first came notably into vogue with Kingsley's "Hypatia." Theology as a background—and in Kingsley's masterpiece few would call it more—may be excellent. Moreover if the underlying spirit consist of religion rather than theology, belief rather than mere doctrine, it need not be treated controversially as trying to uphold any sect, but emotionally as dominating some character, some life. In such aspect, of course, it may become a very valuable "motive" for an intense tale. "Hypatia," viewed in this light, is a most noble work. The emotional deeps of religious experience which it so vividly portrays, can be followed with entire ignorance of the doctrinal purpose. The latter, as is now well known, was to uphold the cause of the Church of England against Catholicism, and of "broad church" against "high church" views. So carefully, however, was this aim kept subordinate, that few beyond those specially interested ever note the controversial points, and the impress of the work upon the general public has been very far from what Kingsley must have

<sup>1</sup>Another dangerous tendency in the political novel lies in the prominent position usually given its hero. The novel is intended to deal with ordinary life, so that each reader may find something of himself reflected in its central figures. A Prime Minister of England comes so near to being a king, that tales about him seem to be harking back to the old days of the superhuman, the times when only kings and knights were fit subjects for any literary mention. The same criticism applies to the handling of the President of the United States, though one or two recent novels have touched that high office rather effectively, by dealing with its incumbent only in his personal relations as a man.

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wished. From which one may perhaps take warning that it is safer to label theological works as such, and to cast them in some stricter, more synthetic form of argument.

In this brief review I have left until the last those forms of the novel in which background assumes what seems its chief legitimate importance.

**The  
Novel of  
Locality**

This is in tales which deal with some period, some place, or some race of people, unfamiliar to the reader. In hear-

ing of our own times, we unconsciously supply out of our own experience a great deal of the necessary setting. For our own locality we supply that subtler, completer, more enveloping medium, the "atmosphere." Of our own race we know the usual characteristics. If any or all these aids to comprehension desert us, the author has special difficulties to face; he must make good the deficiency. Hence there arise three slightly specialized forms requiring special treatment. The "historic novel" treats of other times, and the "local novel" depicts some little known locality, striving to emphasize its peculiarities. As to the third form, which seeks to reveal the outlook of some wholly different race, such as to us would be the Hindus or Japanese, this presents so many obvious difficulties both of sure understanding on the author's part and sympathetic appreciation and enjoyment on the reader's, that not until the present generation have any serious attempts been made in its direction.

The novel of locality, the tale, that is, which deliberately draws into itself something of the purpose of geography, of travel, and aims to inform the world of readers as to the peculiarities of some scarce known dis-

racial  
Novel

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

trict, or which in a higher view aims to show how human character and human passion in that district develop and express themselves along peculiar lines, "life modified by environment," this form of novel begins with Miss Edgeworth's Irish stories. Of course there had been "travellers' tales" and travelling heroes before. Defoe's adventurers wandered everywhere; but to every land they brought, and in every clime they found, the habits and the thoughts of English tradesmen. Voltaire's "Candide" searched the entire world, but found human nature everywhere the same. Johnson's "Rasselas" explored the deeps of Africa, but learned there only what the author's London meditations taught.

Miss Edgeworth was an originator. She was familiar with a place and people which most of her readers did not know; she was aware of the latter's lack of knowledge; and she deliberately set herself to inform them. Thus began the novel of locality. Lady Morgan, Banim, Griffin, Lover, and a dozen others followed Miss Edgeworth in delineating Irish life. Mrs. Hamilton, Scott, Hogg, Galt, and their successors did the same for Scotland. Turgenev caught the idea, and revealed the Russian wilderness and the Russian peasants' suffering, brought their agony home not only to intellectual Europe but to the Russian autocracy, and secured the freedom of the serf. Cooper supplied to generations of Europeans their distorted ideas about American life. Balzac wrote "A Passion of the Desert."

Following these broad pictures sketched from an entire country, came the modern studies of narrower districts, drawn with a closer view, Blackmore's "Lorna

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Doone," Hardy's Wessex Tales, Barrie's single Scottish village. The genuinely local novel has been far more developed in England than elsewhere in Europe. In France almost everything has a Parisian tendency, a metropolitan outlook, while in the other European countries the national tale still continues more important than the narrower form.

The chief development of the novel of locality, however, has naturally taken place in America. Our land presents no sharp separation of mutually interested classes, to give perennial attraction to sketches of a single town; but it presents a far wider variance of scene and life and character than England; and it has escaped the centralizing tendency of France. Hence in the period since the Civil War this form of novel has here advanced almost to perfection. What Bret Harte did for the Western frontier, Cable has done for Louisiana, and Miss Wilkins for the New England country life. Howells has sung the Iliad of the Boston merchant. One might run on with the list indefinitely. Scarce a State but has its careful studious "photographer"; scarce a form of American life but has been put honestly on record in a story.

The technique of this form of novel must obviously take note of both the narrowed outlook and the complicated purpose. The novelist of locality seeks not only to interest the general public with a story; he can not simply present characters which readers know from experience, depict passions which they recognize as their own. He must lead them beyond experience, convince them of that which they can not measure for themselves. He must therefore in his work discriminate carefully between such

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

acts and feelings as are individual and hence universal, and such as are more nearly sectional. The former he may trust his readers to understand. The latter he must dwell upon, showing what there is in the locality to cause them, what makes them true though unusual. This problem of selection suggests why the native of a district is not always its best historian, either in fact or fiction. What is most peculiar, may well seem to him most commonplace; and what is most noteworthy, be most ignored. Only by distance can one get a true perspective. Only the native who has been long away and learned a larger world, can understand how to present to that larger world the differences of his lesser one. Even then love may prevent him seeing the harsher truths about his home, or loyalty restrain him from confessing them.

Beyond these difficulties, granting that the novelist sees a locality truthfully and broadly, and that he holds his general public interested, satisfied, and convinced, beyond there lie other trials. He must satisfy the people whom he claims to represent. Local dignity is easily insulted, as Miss Wilkins has found in New England to her cost; and who shall learn from the work of the local novelist, if not the inhabitants of the locality itself? Nay, if they reject his picture, how shall the world be brought to accept it, and the writer gather personal profit? On the other hand, he who flatters, misrepresents. He is no longer the historian but the romancer. He is describing an imaginary not a real community. He has returned to the art of Johnson and Voltaire. A great novelist he may be, but a novelist of locality he is not; and the public will soon pierce his false pretense.

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The historic novelist faces problems which, while similar to these, are not wholly the same. If he blacken the

truth of history, he will be met by no body of indignant townsfolk with protesting mayor and church elders at their head, all eager to repudiate him. His

### The Historic Novel

opponents at worst—or at best—will only be learned historians against whom he can argue in the newspapers, while, as to which side is right, the public will know little and care not at all. The past has escaped forever from our control; the present, we are now at work on, molding it under our hands. Hence in our general dealing with old days we exact no such reliability of information, no such businesslike accuracy of statement and of figures, as we do for present matters. For this reason the past has always remained the field in which the romancer, as distinguished from the realist, loves best to ramble. The romance set in some distant place has been rare since the days of *Paltock* and *St. Pierre*; for modern inventions have brought the far-off near, and left few secret corners to our narrowing world. But the romance set in distant time continues to hold its own.

No sharp distinction, however, has ever been drawn between the romance of history and what ought in technical accuracy be meant by the "historic novel": that is, the simple, human story placed amid the real history and mode of living of some former day. We still carelessly class under a single title such fantasies as Dumas' tale of the iron mask, which gives to history a turn wholly false; such laborious studies as Doyle's "*White Company*," which gives it a setting wholly true; and such works as

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Miss Mühlbach's, which are largely history itself, though sometimes history mistold.

Since the name is so loosely applied, the origin of the historic novel can scarcely be associated with an exact time or man. What is meant by the common statement that the form began with Scott is only that he was the first to unite a real knowledge of history with a real knowledge of story telling and a little tact, wherewith so to interweave the two as to produce an impression of reality. This impression Scott certainly conveyed to his own generation, however we may criticise him in ours. If the "history" of a tale is to be tested simply by its nominal time, by the fact that it seeks this freedom from acute criticism that is gained by placing events in an age other than the present, the great Sir Walter was by no means the first to grasp at this. It was a trick known even to Greek romance. It was what Madame Lafayette desired when she narrated her own idealized story as happening at the court of Henry II. It is what Mr. Hope attains when, as in the "Prisoner of Zenda," he revives the manners, the ideals, and even the swordplay, of mediæval days, and places them in an imaginary European country of to-day.

Or if our test be merely the use of great historic names, then also there were countless such novels before Scott. Indeed the favorite French fiction of the seventeenth century was that which told of Cyrus the Great of Persia, or of Cleopatra, or Alexander, or some other personage whose well-known cognomen might catch the casual eye. Once beyond the title page, these tales freed themselves wholly from any solicitude as to the truth about their



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patronym, usually even from any acquaintance with that truth. Prévost as late as 1732 selects for a hero an imaginary illegitimate son of Oliver Cromwell, and paints the mighty Protector as a puerile figure recognizable only by the name and rank. In England, the half-century between Richardson and Scott produced scores and scores of tales whose titles talked of ancient kings.

Not even the effort to give some genuine historic instruction was new with Scott. It had been rather ignorantly attempted by several of the earlier writers, notably Miss Porter in her "Scottish Chiefs." It had been accomplished with true antiquarian precision by Scott's friend Mr. Strutt in his "Queen-hoo Hall," a book which the greater author completed on his friend's death. What Scott did was to combine all these values with that other value, an interesting story.

Since his time the historic novel has divided itself quite clearly into the three classes I have suggested. Their separate value and need of separate names can best be appreciated by studying their differences. First and most numerous come the romances, seeking only the freedom of the past wherein to write of mighty deeds and overwhelming passions. With the actual life of a special period or its important events, these tales have small concern. Great historic leaders are used only as figure heads, hollow puppets revolving around the romantic youth and maiden. The second class are the typical novels, which, corresponding to the novels of locality, deal earnestly and honestly with the human life of a bygone day. They try to see clearly the ordinary person of that age, marking both in character and passion the differences and resem-

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blances, compared with our modern type. Kings and celebrities are either kept in vaguest background or else treated from the human standpoint, depicted not in their acts of prominence but in the trivial detail of daily life. From this personal side they may even be closely studied and made central figures, as is so well done in "Richard Yea-and-nay," or so picturesquely in Weyman's Henry of Navarre. Then thirdly there is what might be called storified history, consisting of all the tales that really have the teaching of history as their chief motive, but aim to unify and simplify the passing show as it would have appeared to a single actor on the scene, and aim to vivify the scene by placing it in association with some human passion. These tales look on kings as eagerly as does history itself, and catch at the outside, painting the monarchs in their famous moments, in the poses that we know, rather than in the friendly intimacy that lies beyond history's ken. In brief, such tales strive to accomplish with some great historic event or epoch what Smollett did with life, present it as a series of pictures vivified and connected by the passage through them of some imaginary central figure.<sup>1</sup>

Of course these three varieties shade into one another more or less; and further, if one chooses to insist, it is quite possible that only the middle one has a very positive

<sup>1</sup>This third form is sometimes antiquarian rather than historical, that is, it wishes to describe customs, furniture, occupations or beliefs, rather than to narrate events. Even so noted a writer, so skilled a technician, as Théophile Gautier, loses himself in this abyss, this effort to reconstruct for the reader an entire world of obsolete details. For instance, in his Egyptian novel, the "Romance of a Mummy," the entire first half is devoted wholly to Egyptian archæology, architecture, scenery, and what not. Only

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right to be called a novel at all. Yet romance has not only a fascination but also a value of its own. And for storified history, in an age which insists on making education pleasing, there is much to be said. So long as there is a public demand for this work, so long as even Henty's books for boys continue to sell by thousands, just so long will the supply of such books continue. They certainly have a value in stirring curiosity, and supplying some sort of historical ideas to those who would otherwise remain wholly unaroused. Upon the workers in this field one can only urge that they avoid equally the wilful mendacity of Dumas, who misrepresented history for dramatic effect, and the carelessness of Scott, who misconceived the past.

As to the middle style, the true "historic novel," the very name confesses that this is a compound form. It can scarce be written at all without intruding upon the realms of one or other of its companions. How many recent historic tales have been wholly free from the exaggeration of romance? How many avoid carrying on their shoulders historical portraiture unconnected with the story? Moreover, books of this peculiar class may perhaps be improved by their excrescences. Who, as he sips comfortably at one of these tales, or roused to deeper eagerness drains it at a draught, who, I say, would wish away either the dash of extravagance or the underlying

after more than thirty thousand musical words have rolled before the reader's eyes, does the story itself, the justly celebrated story, begin. When at last, or if, one reaches this, it is simple, powerful, direct. It paints broad human emotions, deals with Moses, the deliverance of the Jews and the pursuit of Pharaoh, and is fully understandable without any of the voluminous burden of preamble.

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dose of history? The one lends sparkle to the drink; the other lends excuse for drinking it. What would be left of the "Tale of Two Cities" if Sidney Carton were compelled to act with common sense right from the start? And who on the other hand would cut from "Henry Esmond" its pictures of Dick Steele and Addison and Swift?

Consider "Henry Esmond" as the type, and it becomes evident that historic novels may do far more for history than make it "pleasant medicine." They may vivify, they may interpret it, as the sober historian never can. Fiction has justified its right of taking liberties with even this high subject, not liberties of contradicting the known, but of guessing at the unknown. So Thackeray explains the unexplained, gives a reason why the Stuarts failed to return to power after Queen Anne.

In fact, glancing back over the entire field just covered, there seems no work in which the analysis of background values can be better studied than in "Henry Esmond," or perhaps "Hypatia."<sup>1</sup> In both of these masterpieces, largely because of their historic character, background is pushed to its fullest practical value. In neither, I think, does it go beyond this. The historic purpose never overrides, never even competes against the novelistic.

Neither does the background in these two works confine itself to the single object of supplying the historic set-

<sup>1</sup>Another work which naturally suggests itself for inclusion here is General Wallace's "Ben-hur," that marvellously broad-embracing picture of Judean life as it was stirred by the emotion and dominated by the passion of the Christ. I find, however, that the general feeling both of the public and the critics is that the background here is over massive, that the story is too thinly strung, too nearly lost amid the mighty pictures.

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ting. In "Hypatia" the problem of spiritual life, its hold upon each mind, is kept flashing across every page. I can not conceive any reader laying down the finished book without turning its question in upon himself. In "Henry Esmond" the weakness of human purpose, the helpless sadness of human love, are stamped on every paragraph. Here the author, speaking always in the person of Esmond, runs Esmond's comment through it all. In "Hypatia" many varied characters speak out their thoughts, but those thoughts turn, under the author's guidance, always in the same direction. In this respect "Hypatia" seems mechanically perfect. The absolute exclusion of all extraneous matter despite the vast, kaleidoscopic variety of figures presented, is marvellous. Perhaps it is too perfect; there is almost too much of the "personally conducted" idea. The reader gets no opportunity to pause and observe for himself the wonderful world unrolled to view.

In this respect the careless freedom of "Esmond" is more natural. Its unity seems dependent on the hero's, or perhaps the author's, natural bent of mind. Thus the impressions that the reader slowly gathers, the meditative pathos and the gentle firmness, rise apparently out of his own inner self; they are not forced upon him. Thoughts thus aroused become "us," and remain with us. If an author's higher success lie, as some have thought, in making a permanent impress upon the reader's soul, then the ambitious student can never too carefully examine the background effects in Thackeray's four great novels.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The four great works on which Thackeray's fame rests, "the great quadrilateral" as they have collectively been called, are "Vanity Fair," "The Newcomes," "Henry Esmond," and "Pendennis." His other works are admittedly subordinate.

## CHAPTER VII

### STYLE

**Importance of Style** Having faced the novel from so many different viewpoints, having learned that both the opinion of critics and the practice of novelists have dealt with each one of these widely differing essentials as being the true core and value of the whole, we would almost seem to have exhausted the field. Yet turning to the question of style, we again find authors eager to assert that this, this at last, is the supreme point at issue, that here lies the success or failure of the novelist. Is he an artist? Has he the sense, the taste, the power, for a successful "style"?

Even so noted a critic as Professor Saintsbury, after glancing over the general novelistic field with broad catholicity and allowing that "the attractions which will suffice to lure a reader through one reading, and in some cases even enable him to enjoy or endure a second, are very numerous and various," even Saintsbury then insists that to hold permanent attention there must be "one or both of two things, style and character."

Fielding, to whom I have appealed so frequently as the first great conscious artist to essay the novel, gives a definite opinion. "The excellence of the mental entertainment consists less in the subject than in the author's skill in well dressing it up." Besant, who having achieved such a material success as a novelist reached out his hand

## STYLE

to young beginners and turned teacher of his art, has given warning to all: "It is almost impossible to estimate too highly the value of careful workmanship, that is, of style." Looking to novelistic work itself, one observes with something of regret how many modern writers have made large popular reputations upon their mere ability to use pretty words and interweave them in musical effects of sound, poetic half-tints of voluptuous suggestion. It almost seems as if a novelist need have nothing to say at all, if only he can say that nothing well.

What then is this "style," which to practical writers has seemed so overpoweringly important? Really there are

**The Two  
Problems  
Involved**

two separate problems involved: one deals with details, with the wording, the phraseology; the other with general construction, with the method of the entire

work. The first of these two problems is mental and rhetorical. Shall a writer use sentences of one form or another? Shall he write as Johnson did in a familiar letter of travel, "a dirty fellow bounced out of the bed on which one of us was to lie," or as Johnson expressed the same fact in his book, "Out of one of the beds on which we were to repose, started up, at our entrance, a man black as a Cyclops from the forge"?<sup>1</sup> Shall his style be positive or suggestive, simple or recondite, prosaic or poetical?

These are questions which arise in every department of thought, which have a history as wide as literature itself, and a technique which can be left to the thousand able

<sup>1</sup>It was Macaulay who first called attention to this particular example of Johnson's habit of deliberate translation from English into "Johnsonese."

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

works on rhetoric. In the particular application of these questions to the novel, I would only wish to emphasize two points. First, if the novel aims to reproduce real life, and to be a simplification of life, its diction must be both real and simple. Upon the novel emphatically seems laid the command to avoid all pomposity and ornateness. Second, if the novelist intends to depict emotion, he must use the language of emotion, must find means to suggest such depths as flatly measured measuring words can never plumb. In brief his work must have the heart of poetry without the mechanical form, the feeling without the "figures of speech." This poetic art of diction is what makes a noted novelist of Sterne, who has neither plot nor passion; and the same felicitous touch has made the reputation of many an author since.

The subject of the novel's diction is not easy of discussion in the English language; because in this one point the French novelists have certainly done far better work than their English-speaking brethren, and philological beauties are untranslatable. The French novel caught much of its early beauty of wording from Rousseau. Châteaubriand in his "Martyrs," as early as 1809, gave to the world a masterpiece of melody, and to France a text-book from which her authors have learned much. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Victor Hugo and Lamartine were the great masters of prose style; and Balzac, striving to match them in this as he outmatched them in larger matters, spent endless labor on his printers' proofs, studying every phrase, recasting every sentence again, again and yet again.

### **The French Mastery of Wording**



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Higher even than any of these rose Flaubert, whose language seems indeed the perfection of art, who deliberately set himself to write passages dependent wholly on euphony of style. Indeed the French novel has had schools and wordy wars of magazines, which turned upon the use of words. The brothers Goncourt supported the "daring and temerarious" epithet, the adjective forced to do strange and unusual duties, as against what they contemptuously called the "adjectives common to all the world."

To a quieter taste it must be confessed that "style" seems here to run riot, to obtrude itself at the expense of other values. Yet the same intense devotion to words has, in the present generation, manifested itself among some English novelists.

In England, at the beginning, the novel inclined rather toward carelessness and crudity of style. One must admit of Richardson that he was cumbrous of sentence form, and hampered by a vague vocabulary, which he used with little taste. Fielding's sentence form was strong and his wording aptly chosen, but he was not himself gifted with a musical ear, and often when he thought his phraseology most eloquent, it was most harsh. Scott, who could discriminate so delicately in poetry, was careless of his style in prose. His method of composition was the reverse of that of Balzac; for he often neglected to re-read what he had written, but rushed it off to the printer, and ignored the proofs. As a result he is verbose and bombastic, sometimes sinking to tautology and grammatical blunders. Cooper, a true poet at heart, was

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sadly hampered by lack of a thorough education, and would wander on helplessly through pages of inarticulated verbosity, until a chance word, a thought, would rouse the divine spark within, and he would dash off chapter upon chapter full of fire, force, and music. Then the inspiration flickered, and again the work maundered on.

Some English novelists, however, have been critics also, and euphony received early admiration in England, and a study, careful and poetic, if not always artistic and successful. Goldsmith wrote with a simple melody which still retains its charm. Johnson's ponderosity is very largely attributable to his pleasure in the harmonies of Latin words, the rolling cadences of polyphonic sound. Mrs. Radcliffe brings her wording very close to poetry, and many a woman novelist has done so since. To a critic taste these writings often verge on empty noise; but the less educated public which would overlook more delicate effects, has frequently been caught by these loud harmonies. Women readers at least are always half poets at heart; and those that can not follow the finest music, will grasp eagerly at ruder rhythms.

Adverse criticism on so delicate a point as this can be of little value. Dickens' vast popular fame was due in part to the music of his lines. A public too unpractised to follow melody through the mechanical precision and wandering thought of written poetry, could yet feel and enjoy the looser harmony, the cadences of sound that flowed through Dickens' prose. The sensuous effect of hearing or even of reading Dickens is undeniably strong. This giant of sentiment, untrained and unrestrained, swept away public and critics too in a veritable debauch



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of sympathetic feeling. The cavillers of our later day point out that he carried rhythm to extremes, that his writing becomes not an address but a chant, that he is sentimental, by which they mean silly, and hysterical. Yet the fact remains that he carried away the critics of his own day, that they wept with him, that Thackeray threw upon a printer's desk as if in despair the serial issue containing the death of Little Paul crying, "There's no writing against such power as this—one has no chance!" The extravagance of Dickens is at least preferable to the cautious mediocrity that can do nothing.

I would not seem to say that there have been no true "masters of the verbal phrase" in English. Our poetry abundantly justifies us on this head. I only wish to emphasize that in the novel there has been no continuous development of style, there are as yet no fully established and generally admitted principles to which one can appeal. Every novelist starts in to be a law unto himself; and were it not for that blessed human habit of imitating success whether we understand it or no, there would be monstrosities perpetrated too horrible to dream on.

Of high and felicitous taste in words have been such artists as Miss Austen, whose music is a constant pleasure to the practised ear, and Thackeray, whose style has been by some exacting connoisseurs placed in the foremost English rank. Delicate judges who turn away from most of our literature as overloud, obtrusive, overfull of rhetorical device, who maintain that good style should be so clear as to be invisible, should concentrate the reader's

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attention on the thought and never distract notice to itself, such judges point to Thackeray. The contrast is sharply drawn by Mr. Brownell in his valuable essay upon Thackeray: "Burke's elevation does not wholly save his style from that tincture of rhetoric which is the vice of English style in general—that rhetorical color which is so clearly marked in the contentious special pleading of Macaulay, in the exaltation of Carlyle, in the rhapsody of Ruskin, in the periodic stateliness of Gibbon, and even in the dignity of Jeremy Taylor. Thackeray's is as destitute of this element as Swift's or Addison's, with which, of course, it is rather to be compared. Rhetoric means the obvious ordering of language with a view to effect—when it does not spring from the elementary desire simply to relieve one's mind; and the great merit of the Queen Anne writers—from whom Thackeray derives—is their freedom from this element of artistic mediocrity. . . . Thackeray is undoubtedly to be classed with the world's elegant writers—the writers of whom Virgil may stand as the type and exemplar, the writers who demand and require cultivation in the reader in order to be understood and enjoyed." Mr. Brownell then appeals to Carlyle, whose praise of Thackeray he quotes: "Nobody in our day wrote, I should say, with such perfection of style."

In contradistinction to this method, and on a level equally high, stands the intensely poetic prose of Poe. In a more recent generation come the haunting melodies which float through Stevenson, and the usually crisp, aggressive, warlike note of the Kipling sentence, which the author has known how to modulate so effectively in his

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Mowgli tales; while in Meredith's work appears the studied extravagance of the French school of epithet, which has not as yet proved over popular with English readers.

Dismissing thus briefly all the questions of wording as belonging really to the broader field of rhetoric and

equally pertinent in their application to

all forms of literature, we come to the

second and larger problem of "style" as

it applies specifically to the novel, as it

deals with method rather than with detail. Where shall

the novelist begin and how? Shall he adopt the analytic

method or the dramatic; that is, shall he pick his char-

acters apart, or show only the outside; describe feelings

and their causes, or only actions and expressions? Shall

he prefer dialogue or narrative? Shall he speak in his

own person to make comments, and if so shall he appear

unobtrusively like Dickens, or in a style dotted with I's

like Thackeray? Shall he keep wholly aloof from the

entire tale, or shall he swing to the other extreme and

pose as a character within it? If the latter, shall he be the

hero, or a minor figure acting as a sort of chorus? Or

shall he, by adopting the device of a series of letters or

larger detached narratives, become every character in

turn? In brief what is the best, or the least awkward,

"form" for a story to assume?

In examining these problems one can scarcely ex-

pect to reach any final or decisive exalting of one method

over another. Each one has advantages, and alas, disad-

vantages equally obvious. Neither can an historical sur-

vey be of much avail.

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It is interesting of course to note that the earliest Greek and mediæval tales were objective and dramatic, just as it is interesting to note that Mr. Kipling expresses a belief that the earliest form of fiction was the autobiography. On the question of method, however, there is nothing very definite to be gathered from the early manuscripts, except that the oldest Egyptian tale fails to bear out Mr. Kipling's theory. Taken as a mere guess, I should think it more probable that the first tellers of tales chose heroes larger and vaguer than themselves, and that their telling was so wholly impersonal and objective as to have satisfied Maupassant himself, the high priest and teacher of the novel's objectivity. It also seems probable that early stories were dramatic, not analytic, and that wherever conversation occurred it was repeated word for word. Consider as bearing upon these points, not only the ways of uncultured man to-day with his "says I, says he," but also the old folk-lore, the fairy tales which have been handed down through almost every race.

The Egyptian tales were, as we have seen, unstudied and confused in form. The Greek romances inclined to employ elaborate machinery. Mediæval fiction, whether or not it had considered all these questions, had dealt in all these forms. Before the "modern" novel appeared in the eighteenth century, mediæval fiction had dealt in all the various methods, though perhaps with little consideration of the problems involved. Chaucer had been dramatic in method; Madame Lafayette analytic. "Beowulf" or the German "Reinecke Fuchs" had been impersonal; while, on the other hand, as early as the "Song of Roland" and the "Nibelungenlied" the author appeared in the

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background to comment, to express surprise or regret. For the obtrusively personal "I" we must perhaps come down as far as the essayists, such as Addison and Steele. The picaresque tales show the author speaking as hero. He poses as a minor figure of the story in More's "Utopia." Even the device of a series of letters had been suggested by Abelard and Eloise, by Montesquieu's "Persian Letters," and in the direct novelistic line by such works as "The Letters of Lindamira," an inconsequent sketch not unlike Defoe's tales in purpose, which had been published in London over a score of years before "Pamela" was written.

Hence in the matter of form there was nothing for the later novel to create, it could only adapt old styles to modern purposes. Neither has there ever been uniformity of method among the novelists even of a single period. Richardson's chance-born form of a series of letters was indeed adopted by many of his imitators; but Fielding and all the "realists" of the day rejected it with ridicule.

As to the fitness of this much disputed form, which the modern novel adopted at its first appearance, there can

### **The Value of the Letter Form**

be no question that for Richardson's peculiar line of genius no other arrangement would have sufficed. The self-satisfied printer appears before us as the

lucky beneficiary of a most unusual string of coincidences. The elimination of any one of the series would have destroyed the result. The somewhat petty nature of the man, his bashfulness and vanity, the occupations of his letter-writing youth, the printing business to which he devoted his manhood, his religious absorption, the prac-

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tical plan of his associates to publish a text-book of letter-writing for the ignorant, all these accidents of life had to combine and pass in ordered sequence before the last of them could rouse Richardson's deeply hidden, over-cruised genius to the production of a masterpiece.

For dramatic purposes, whether of objective portrayal or excited action, the letter form is almost useless. Since the letter must be "in character" with the supposed writer, the revelation of that character becomes its most evident effect, and the author must pen words such as an ordinary person would, words of idle discussion and self-expression with fragments of news thrown in, never a wholly objective sketch. So, too, the idea of any tragic movement culminating in the death or disappearance or even the serious injury of the writer is precluded by the very existence of the letter itself. The hero—or more commonly the heroine—could still write.

The clumsiness of the scheme constitutes yet another objection. To be at all natural the writer must say so much beside the points that bear upon the story. Even the most wholly egoistic man does not entirely ignore the affairs of his correspondent, and devote his letters solely to an account of himself and his emotions. Moreover each emotional scribe must be supplied with an equally emotional confidante, who shall consent not only to read these outbursts but to answer them in kind, and shall continue to thrill clamorously at second hand with sorrows warmed over from the day before.

Back of this lies still the intrinsic improbability of the whole conception. Could any sane "young person" write out her entire soul? And if she could, yet would she?



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Would she confess herself with absolute sincerity to a distant friend and entrust the most embarrassing secrets, even black enduring shame, to the chances of the postbox and the irrefragable positiveness of the written word? And if one can not conceive such recklessness even in a young and inexperienced woman, with her crying need for sympathy, how can it be postulated of a man? A very young and very pure angel, wholly unsuspecting of the mischances and the malice of the world, might write that way; so might a devil corresponding with another devil and protected by lack of physical body from the punishments of the police court. But if any human person essayed it in real life, he or she would be branded, even by the trusted confidante, as an utterly unreliable *poseur*.

All of these objections to the letter form were seen upon its first appearance, and thoroughly canvassed by Richardson's friends and his enemies. As a presentation of "real life" his effusions were hooted at by many critics. He himself had felt both the difficulties and the limitations of his method. He is compelled to present the peasant Pamela as able not only to analyze her subtlest feelings but also to write most poetically of them and of her trials to her parents. To explain this unusual degree of culture, she is represented as having been excessively educated, at the whim of a patroness. Her peasant father's ability to read her elaborate accounts and answer them in kind, also necessitates special explanation. Other folks write explanations of the plot. Later, Richardson finds himself compelled to break in upon the correspondence and appear in person to explain the details, to account for

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her master's having secretly read all that she wrote, and to enforce the morals. Finally, too, it becomes so obvious that if the abducted Pamela can send letters she can be rescued, that the author is reduced to having her write a diary instead. A diary which her persecutors can take from her at any moment, is used as a confessional for everything she does not want them to know. In the story one may skim over all these absurdities, accept them as poetic license; but any real case of the kind would be impossible. A suspicious person would certainly accuse Miss Pamela, for instance, of expecting that diary to be read, and of scheming for just the alluring and remorseful effect that it ultimately has upon her master. As to her father's later letters, he had certainly found time, even among the many duties entailed by his sudden affluence, to struggle through a course of rhetoric. He avoids all mention of the fact; but its effect on the poetic balance of his effusions is undeniable.

If Richardson had failed to note any one of all these flaws, they must have been fully and carefully pointed out to him. Yet eight years later he employed the same letter form for his masterpiece, "Clarissa Harlowe"; and another five years beyond he used it for his third and final novel. Why? To him at least there were advantages outweighing all its evils. First and greatest was that his aim was to reveal "the deeps of the human heart," and who can truly know those deeps except the owner of the heart? Therefore he insists that each heroine, as in his later books each hero, shall speak for herself, rather than be revealed through the medium of an author's opinions of her. This is the method of real life, folks speak-

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ing at first hand and all interpretation of their true worth left to us. Then, for fear we misinterpret, comes the confidante, exclaiming, admiring, censuring, revealing the opinion of the world. Everything is seen in a double, often in multiple, light, even as it is in life itself. First is given the event, and the heroine's reflections on it; then often comes the hero's account of it, and his reflections also; next come the impressions of her confidante, and of his, and finally the disapproval of some enemy, and the usually mistaken comments of the outer world.

Is it any wonder that we can get to know Clarissa and Clementina and Harriet Byron as we know few other women either in fiction or in fact? Richardson's truths are displayed not in an illuminative flash, such as Shakespeare uses to reveal the world, or as Scott employs to enforce just so much knowledge of life as he possesses; Richardson's portraiture comes slowly, painstakingly, bit by bit. But in the end it is irresistible. Clarissa's methodical housekeeping, for instance, is so insisted upon by everybody in the book that finally, through sheer force of repetition, the reader comes to accept it almost as a matter of conscience. Looking solely to this aspect of convincingness, one is tempted to urge that all novelists should use the letter method.

When every fact has thus to pass through so many hands and receive so many comments the reason for the narrow field and yet interminable length of our first novelist's works becomes apparent. Later men, the French *feuilleton* writers, Sue and Hugo, present us tales as long as "Clarissa Harlowe"; but they fill their pages with multiplicity of characters and incidents. Richard-

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son's length consists of commentary and repetition and careful analysis of feeling.

Another value of the letter or diary form<sup>1</sup> is its element of suspense. All other forms assume to have been written after the event has been completed. The writer knows how everything turned out, and the clever reader has thus small difficulty in knowing too. If the dénouement is not deliberately hinted at or admitted, the very air of the writer, his solemnity, or extravagance, or gayety, confesses it. But the letter is supposed to have been sent while the future was unknown. Its tone, bright or gloomy, is caught from the evanescent present, not from the settled past. It fills the reader with its own futile hope, its own causeless fears. His mind wavers as real minds do waver in our changing world. He is as resolute or as timorous as the writer of the letter. He is as over-sure or as over-silly.

It was this that held readers to Richardson despite length and longwindedness. It was this that brought weeping women to the author's feet to entreat him to let Clarissa live. They were sharing her uncertainty as they had shared, in milder and more pleasant form, her every terror and her every hope.

Considering the remarkable advantages thus offered,

'The bearing of all these technical points upon the very similar diary form seems too obvious to need separate comment. A diary affords excuse for much franker self-confession; but a real diary, as was evidenced with Marie Bashkirtseff, must of necessity be so discursive, so filled with a thousand thoughts leading away in a thousand different directions, that any story, any central unity to the whole, would be quite impossible. The imaginary diary, which only pretends to wonder whither it is going while really it knows full well and advances with sufficient directness, is a form which has been repeatedly and very effectively used.

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there is no cause for surprise that this form was followed by so many of Richardson's admirers. It even became less improbable with time, for it set the fashion among young ladies, and they actually began the writing of elaborate letters and composing of endlessly poetic diaries. The form was adopted by Miss Burney, and occasionally by Miss Edgeworth. Miss Austen's instinctive sense for truth led her to reject it, and even to heap it with ridicule in "Northanger Abbey"; but her very ridicule shows the prevalence of the form. One rather marvels that Mrs. Radcliffe, with her eagerness for romance and her search for tense emotion, should have passed by the agonized epistle. What opportunities it would have offered the distressed heroine for exaggerating her fears! Only the increasing modern demand for verisimilitude, the increased value set upon reality, has finally driven the letter form into comparative disuse; and it is still occasionally employed for works of character portrayal or of tender poetic emotion, such as give little heed to story.

With the passing of the letter form, there passed away to some extent the analytic method. This change resulted not only because the letter writer, the character within the tale, is the only one who can be really subjective at first hand and describe emotions from within; but also because of the success of Jane Austen and of Scott. Miss Austen is essentially objective. She depicts the world as she sees it, nothing else. She does indeed describe character, but it is always as that character is seen by somebody else, usually the heroine. The author states the impressions made upon the heroine's mind; but

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never dissects the impression or endeavors to detect on what secret subtle cords emotion had been playing.

Far more popular than Miss Austen and far more positive in his immediate influence upon the novel's form was Scott, with his tremendous dramatic power. His work tends all to incident and animation, to vigor and poetic vision. Emotions to him are spirits, simple, intense, and beautiful; love is an idyllic dream. Analysis is almost wholly foreign to his vehement rush of imagination. He is a picture painter whether of action or of scene. No man before had ever quite known how to outline pictures of action so sharply with the pen, to make them so vivid, so intensely interesting from the spectator's point of view.

Following on Scott's heels came everybody painting pictures. At first because he did; later with a growing recognition that those pictures could be made to convey, perhaps better than any analytic words, the feeling which underlay the scene. It was the instinctive art of the ancient ballad come back in conscious form into the novel. We are shown of the hero, as of Sir Patrick Spens of old, that "a tear blinded his ee," not because the tear-stained eye presents of itself an attractive picture, but in order that the tear may set us to questioning its source, and searching for ourselves the deeps behind the eye. The author calls our attention to such surface manifestations as he thinks will enable both him and us to interpret the underlying soul. This is the dramatic method, which was fully developed by the generation succeeding Scott, and which reached such artistic excellence in Dumas and Poe.

In the hands of less powerful artists this method was

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found to be singularly unconvincing. Readers noted the symptoms but failed to interpret them satisfactorily, sometimes wholly mistook the disease. Nay, some patient book buyers were even so fatuous as to overlook the very symptoms themselves; they took comedy for tragedy and vice versa. The French novelists seem to have received the most annoyance from this cause; and several of them have picturesquely despised the stupid public and, ignoring its neglect, have written on for Art. In France far more than in English-speaking lands is encountered that anomaly, the novel written for the literary critic, as a form distinct from the novel for the public. Such was much of the work of Mérimée, of Gautier, and more recently of Bourget.

The difficulty of dramatic tale telling soon led to that modified form of it, the personally conducted novel.

**The Personally Conducted Novel**      this the author attends his scenes as interpreter; and having pointed out each sob, he hints what each may mean, or explains just what it can not mean. This was the method of Bulwer's later work. Dickens adopted it, and handled it with delightful skill, knowing almost always just what to point out, just where to comment. Perhaps he goes a bit over far, is a bit uncomplimentary in assuming we are all so nearly blind. He explains too much. Some critics declare he is over-emphatic, and becomes a bore. This, I think, is only another way of indicating one cause of his perennial popularity with children, and with youngsters who still need a guide in the A B C of life. The old folk turn from him to Thackeray.

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Thackeray's work swings perhaps to the other extreme. He will scarce point out enough to serve the popular necessity. You must watch closely if you would understand his people, while you read. How marvellously subtle, for example, is that portraiture of Beatrix Esmond at her lover's hands. There is never a harsh word of reproach, yet the woman stands before us in all her charm, in all her evil, her strength and her vanity. Plenty of comment always appears in Thackeray; but it refers mainly, as I have suggested before, to life in general rather than to the characters of the story. Their acts are made the text for little sermons, which look far beyond the tale. Earlier authors had been content to give their story, show their characters, and leave the reader to meditate upon the result. But Thackeray insists on supplying all the wandering meditation himself. At every moment he holds up the tale to say, "Here is what this suggests to me, the author; follow this line of reflection, please."

This manner with Thackeray is a great success. I suppose he is more read to-day for these same sermons than for his stories. Yet the manner is obviously one of such serious dangers as few would venture to confront. It demands that an author shall be always fresh of thought, always facing life from some new standpoint, never platitudinous, never forgetful of humor and absurdity. Which of us will guarantee that our meditations on the incident presented shall be invariably keener and more attractive than the reader's own? And which of us shall venture on such repeated interruptions of the interest of our tale, shall trust so fully in the reader's complaisance



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to delay, to listen with polite attention to our philosophy of life, and then to resume the story?

The dramatic method of the mid-century novel thus became so overloaded with discussion and interpretation that it was clearly swinging backward toward analysis. In most of George Eliot's work analysis becomes plainly dominant. The author is continually dissecting the motives of her characters. Nor does she simply present the dissected figure for our interpretation, a method which might still be called objective, but insists on supplying the interpretation for us. All she asks of the reader is, that he shall recognize the truth of what he sees.

This also has become the method of the Russian realists, though they study emotion rather than character. Tolstoi's sketch of "Ivan Ilyitch," for example, has no external story to tell, or only one too uselessly unpleasant to be told. Its interest lies in the dissection step by step of Ivan's own feelings, his sufferings and their causes. The slow degeneration of a human being through physical sickness and mental horror is laid before us with a careful explanation and elaboration of each detail which makes it almost too hideous to read.

It is notable that in dealing with these later authors one instinctively speaks of their works as studies. This in fact emphasizes just the change that, under the influence of science, has come upon the novel. The earlier novelists did not "study" in our modern sense. They wrote, as the poet is supposed to write, under the impulse of inspiration. They depicted the world as they themselves

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had seen and known it. Even Fielding's work is but a series of the author's general "impressions of life." So is Richardson's, or Smollett's. On the other hand there is no modern realist worth the name who does not prepare for every novel by a special study, by a long and patient investigation and experimentation on the particular theme involved. He writes of life as the scientist, while earlier novelists wrote as poets.

I am not sure but that the poet's insight into life is apt to be keener than the scientist's of the same period. At any rate the general world seems to have felt it so, and there has been lately a marked reaction against the realists. Investigation of life is again being subordinated to its interpretation. Doubtless the truth is that the really mighty novelist must be investigator and interpreter as well. He must study much; but he must not present the mere record of that study, and expect its acceptance as a work of art. Science is not art. The novelist must use his science as a mountain peak wherefrom to soar into the heavens.

There are other smaller questions of technical form that might still be raised. One is the use of conversation in the novel. There is not much recorded dialogue in eighteenth century novels. Conversations are either summarized in the third person or expanded into speeches, such as the exhortations of Captain Blifil and Allworthy in "Tom Jones."

It is true that Richardson at times falls back upon the drama, and inserts even into his letters the names of the speakers, followed by their words; but this is occasional

**The  
Value of  
Dialogue**

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and exceptional. Jane Austen was the first to use to any extent the directness and simplicity of our oral talk. In fact this is a natural concomitant of the dramatic method, which instead of discoursing to a languid reader in his library easy chair, places a spectator before the proscenium arch and bids him look and listen.

The full power of dialogue was scarcely recognized, however, before Dumas. His best scenes are the ideal of the drama, the quick flashing speech of challenge and reply, which reveals action rather than accompanies it. Of course dialogue can be as prosy and commonplace in books as most of it is in life. But at least Dumas has revealed what it can do in a master's hand. It can unfold action, character, emotion, description, and stage directions, and it can make all these seem natural even when they are most extravagant, convincing when they are most false. To a beginner one would almost be ready to hazard the advice, write dialogue, dialogue all the time, practise to make it tell all your story if you can, but practise also to keep it brief and simple and unstrained. If dialogue sounds booky on the one side, or idle on the other, its value slips away.

As to the novelist within the story, that is, the tale in which either the hero or a minor figure appears as telling the whole, this is a form which, uncommon in the eighteenth century, has lately come into considerable repute. The picaresque romance had posed as autobiography; and the tales of Defoe, the "Gulliver's Travels" of Swift are the direct descendants of this early type. They are the personal narrative of the wandering hero. Robert

**The  
Character  
Author**

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Paltock's "Peter Wilkins" is also a survival of this idea. The genuine novel of the eighteenth century rather rejected this hero form, probably because of its narrowness, as well as its association with wandering adventure. The letter style offered the same advantage of intimate knowledge and natural self-revelation, with more variety. The author speaking from outside the tale could examine the hero more carefully and describe him more accurately. Moreover the falsity, which the hero form shares with that of letters, in calling on a man to speak out everything about himself, prejudiced against it the realists of the day. Even Smollett, whose early narratives gained so much from this vigorous method, abandoned it in his later, more artistic work.

In France the morbid autobiographical novel of self-revelation fell easily into the hero form, but in England it was little used. Goldsmith in his one novel saw its value for character depiction, and made the Vicar of Wakefield his own amanuensis. Such fantasies as Johnstone's "Chrysal," telling the adventures of a guinea piece, almost of necessity adopted the same style; but it found no permanent acceptance in English literature, until Charlotte Brontë recognized it as the only true form for deepest passion, and wrote "Jane Eyre."

Since then, the autobiographical novel has become a standard form for either of three purposes; first for the display of an extreme passion, second for the romance of mere adventure, and third for a whimsical character study of the central figure. Thus in Charlotte Brontë's hands this autobiographic form expressed a devotion so intense that the heroine's own fire burns through the critic

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sense, burns out all thought of character or scene or local coloring, and forbids us to heed aught except the passion. As Defoe and Smollett used the form, for the tale of adventure, it can take us into the heart of the changing scenes. With later masters it makes the reader live the life of the hero, fight and conquer with him, breathe the breath of romance for himself, and escape from all this workaday world of self-responsibility. Who has not lived thus with Jim Hawkins in "Treasure Island," with Ralph Percy in "To Have and To Hold," or with a dozen even bigger heroes one might name? The third use has descended from Goldsmith. In this the writer, supposedly unaccustomed to the trade, is made to reveal himself unconsciously, where least intending it, like Thackeray's Barry Lyndon, or that masterpiece of the style, John Ridd in "Lorna Doone."

The chief difficulty with this form is that it demands acceptance of the fancy that the itch to write has seized upon some worthy gentleman whom it probably never would have touched, and that desire to write miraculously brings with it a professional literary skill. Moreover, the reader must view life through the supposed writer's eyes, and must trust him, except where he is subtly made to reveal his falsity and error, as to both his understanding and his truth about himself and others.

As to the variant of the autobiographic form, the writer as a minor character, I first find this associated with the genuine novel in Richter's work, markedly in his "Quintus Fixlein," published in Germany in 1796. Richter was a most original genius, little bound by precedent, and wholly without any sense of form or of proportion.

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Hence, with a naïveté impossible to any one else, he steps into the climax of his own tale. The quintus, or schoolmaster, Fixlein, has a superstition that he will die upon a certain birthday. His friends deceive him as to his age, he thinks the day is passed, laughs at his own folly, marries and has settled down to happiness, when he accidentally discovers the trick; and, the proper birthday approaching, he lies quietly down to expire. Thereupon Richter himself rushes in to save him, the narrative jumps suddenly into the first person, and Fixlein is rescued, as no other hero has ever so directly been, by the personal intervention of his creator.

This confusion of his own life with that of his puppets is peculiar to Richter. Thackeray, however, does the same thing in a more artistic way when that vague Pendennis floats through several of his novels as their author and becomes the central figure of one. Where the writer is Pendennis and where Thackeray, one is never wholly sure. It was in Thackeray's time that this form became widespread. Emily Brontë has her "Wuthering Heights," told by the ancient housekeeper of the tale. Hawthorne has his "Blithedale Romance," told by Miles Coverdale, a minor poet, the unsuccessful wooer of the heroine.

The difficulties of the form are obvious. How shall a housekeeper become so intimate with all these facts and feelings, and how appreciate them so subtly, and describe them so crisply? As for Miles Coverdale, what right has he to use as a novelist the life secrets of these friends whom he has known as a man—and a gentleman? He writes himself down a cad; and one does not care to spend the entire time required for a novel in the com-

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pany of a cad. With a thorough-paced rascal like Barry Lyndon it is different. One can laugh at him and despise him while reading. But Coverdale invites the reader as a confidante, and the listener shares in the dishonor of the revelations.

A further difficulty in this form lies in the confusion, the shifting of the centre of interest. The minor figure is too much in evidence; one reads the tale hampered not only by the imperfect knowledge of this writer, his lack of positiveness and of power, but also by having eyes fixed too insistently upon the writer's fortunes, rather than the hero's. I remember strongly how this affected me when as a youth I first read "The Blithedale Romance." I did not like Coverdale even then, though I had not analyzed the reason. Yet despite this antagonism, I felt drawn to sympathize with him. His anxieties, his hopes, were displayed ever before my eyes. I came to hope with him that at least one of the ladies would learn to care for him. I read their speeches, watching the effect on Miles; and when the end left him deserted, I was sorry not for the truly central figures of the tale so much as for poor weak Miles, who had talked to me and been my friend, and whom I knew far better than I did the others. In some ways "The Blithedale Romance" is one of Hawthorne's greatest books; but in the matter of form it is defective. I know, indeed, of no work of this type where the confusion of the centre of interest does not form a blemish, unless it be the Sherlock Holmes stories, where the narrator becomes so wholly and impersonally a chorus of admiration, that I do not think any interest was ever lost on him.

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It would seem, then, summing up what has been considered in this chapter, that for certain purposes the hero author novel has a peculiar value, but for general use it is too narrow; that the letter form is too unreal and too prolix, so that neither it nor the minor character as author form is ever likely to be in common use in the future. They can appear only as variants revived for some peculiar cause. If the novelist is to come upon the scene, it must, as a rule, be frankly done in his own person as a commentator who stands outside the tale. The analytic novel compels him to do this, and the only doubtful question is as to whether he shall confine himself to the explanation of the story, or whether he shall venture to discourse, in the manner of Thackeray, on whatsoever application of the theme he will. In the dramatic form, the "I" is not only unnecessary, but almost sure to be crudely in the way. Dialogue there should hold full sway. And so, the cycle of art closing upon itself, one comes to the purely objective form, the most recent and most artificial style of all, which echoes the possible form of the earliest tales. In this modern reproduction the author sternly debars himself from our society, tells his tale in an absolutely impersonal and objective way, and leaves us to draw our own conclusions. Personally I am not sufficiently keen or sufficiently vain to enjoy this style—or perhaps not sufficiently convinced of the unfailing accuracy of our emotional mathematics. Those gesticulating phantom figures disturb my comfort, more than they stir my thought. Am I interpreting them all aright, and as the author intended they should



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be? There is no use explaining to a reader that they are real life, and that he must endeavor to measure them as he would in life. To the reader they are not real. Even though they be photographs rather than creations, yet they are figures caught by a camera other than his eye, impressed upon a brain that thought other things of them than he would have thought, and translated by that brain into another medium than sight, into language, a vehicle notoriously imperfect for conveying ideas. Confronting all these causes for misunderstanding, one does well to demand a guide. In each doubtful situation we ask to know what the author thinks is meant by his own phantasmagoria. Then we can disagree with him at pleasure.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

The reader who has accompanied this examination thus far, must have recognized the difficulty of which he was warned at the start, that the advance has been through an uncharted field. In our forefathers' discussions of the novel, forms of nomenclature were adopted hastily for the convenience of the moment; and these have persisted into our own day. Thus there exist such confusions of name and incoherencies of division as were pointed out, for example, in the so-called "historic novel" or the "novel of manners." No one man to-day is empowered with the authority to sweep all this away, and reestablish the study of fiction on some accurate basis. Yet it may not be amiss to point out some more complete and fundamental outline of division.

Such a division seems deducible from the previous chapters. Of the six elements discussed, the last two, background and style, are obviously the externals, the accessories. Hence an earlier generation seized carelessly upon these as the readiest means of discrimination, just as a hurried observer might classify all buildings not by their inner use but by their materials, brick and stone, or flowers by their colors. To find a more logical and persistent relationship requires a search beneath the surface. The four other elements of the novel reach deep into its being, have each of them an inherent importance; hence

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each must be considered in a division. Three of them, however, may be grouped together; I have suggested that plot might be looked on as a broad term covering action, character, and emotion; that is, the ideal plot would present an advancing action, a developing character and an increasing emotion. Each of these elements stands for a moment as the foremost interest in each novel, and then is pushed aside for the next. There is only one essential that persists through them all, omnipresent, unchallenged, undeniable. That is verisimilitude.

This pervasiveness makes verisimilitude the one unescapable foundation upon which to base a permanent division; though we may gladly employ such further aid as can be gathered from the threefold "plot." That is to say, the true difference between novels lies, as this book has sought to show, not in their choice of time or locality, not in the nature of their background, whether of the mansion or the slum, not even in their artistic method, analytic or dramatic, but in their varying outlook upon life, their varying picture of the human soul and the human fate. Their essential separation lies in their attitude toward universal truth, the amount and the portion of universal law which each perceives and presents.

This view brings forward as the principle of division that quotation from Brander Matthews to which I have already referred: "Fiction dealt first with the Impossible, then with the Improbable, next with the Probable, and now at last with the Inevitable." This does not mean that in advancing to the later forms the earlier types have been left behind. All of them still remain with us—all, that is, except the Impossible. For that, verisimilitude

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has led our age to substitute the mystic, the imaginable, the unknown. Indeed, I doubt if any people ever dealt consciously with the impossible. They merely did as we to-day, they strove to peer beyond the veil, and play with the unknown. We, looking back, call their tales impossible; but shall not a future age say the same of our poetic fancies, our semi-scientific excursions beyond the borderline? In separating novels, therefore, I would regard the Impossible as a variation of the Improbable, but retaining the fourfold division, would speak also of the Accidental.

That is to say, man's outlook upon facts, upon truth, upon life, is really fourfold. First he sees the world as the child does, a mere patchwork of sounds and colors. Each pretty color is viewed separately, and for its own attractiveness; no thought of the harmony, the causes, the relation of one patch to others, disturbs the interest. Wherever the glance chances to fall there it remains, admiring, until chance-turned elsewhere. The gazer deals only with the Accidental. Soon, however, both child and man begin to note a relation between the scattered bits of color, how one springs from another, destroys another. They observe startling results, striking connections, the bizarre, the unusual, the Improbable. With increasing interest comes the desire to understand, comes scientific study. As man grows thoughtful and experienced, he pushes away the odd and the unusual, to examine the usual, to meditate upon its underlying laws. He deals by preference with the Probable. Yet beyond this comes the stage when each of us begins to see, or thinks he sees, some portion of the meaning of it all. He eagerly as-

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serts that such and such are really the laws, the conditions, of existence. He points to the Inevitable.

Accepting this fourfold classification as a groundwork one comes upon various subdivisions. In each class was developed some early and perhaps imperfect form of novel. In each there is a modern partly perfected state. And in each there have been intermediate forms more or less marked in differentiation. The division may be expressed in tabular form as follows:

### I THE NOVEL OF INCIDENT

This is the tale of the Accidental, the tale that is almost wholly lacking in sequence, in plot. It deals with the moment only, with the scene, with adventures chance-tossed together. What it sees may be wholly true, but the truth is seen isolated, unrelated to the larger verities of life. The outlook upon existence is that of the child. There is no effort to summon a reader to the probing of life's inner deeps. Such a work may be either:

1. The "pictures from life" tale, a collection of wholly detached pictures, highly colored with excitement, with poetry, or with humor, and only united by depicting some of the same people in each. This form reaches its highest expression in such works as "Pickwick Papers."

2. The biographical tale, the series of experiences terminable at any moment by old age or marriage or repentance, and only united by following the career of a central personage, as in Smollett's "Roderick Random." This is still largely a "pictures from life" tale, background being prominent. Several of our recent historic novels

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have been notably successful in this form, as for instance Conan Doyle's "White Company."

3. The real novel of adventure, unified by setting forth some definite, difficult task, a goal toward which the hero struggles with final achievement or defeat, though he may encounter endless accidental interventions on the road. Of this class are Stanley Weyman's "Under the Red Robe," or Kipling's "Naulahka."

### II THE NOVEL OF ARTIFICE

This is the tale of the Improbable, the story that depends chiefly upon plot, external or action plot. It deals with surprise, with mystery, with the unexpected. It sees truth perhaps, but only the oddities of truth, where verity fixes a feeble hope upon coincidence, or upon ignorance, and usually gropes blindly toward that comfortable travesty of material payment for immaterial efforts which man miscalls "poetic justice." Such a novel may be either :

1. The story of fear, which holds the excited reader shivering in darkness, by means of hinted horrors or by spectres frankly visible. Such visions haunt the "Castle of Otranto" and Mrs. Radcliffe's more elaborate work.

2. The story of intrigue, of cunning bad folks and rather idiotic good ones, of subtle schemes, intricate knaveries, and surprising secrets coming to light at just the dramatic moment needful for the triumph of virtue and defeat of vice. If one may do so without seeming to belittle the work, I would suggest "Tom Jones" as showing the perfection of this sort of plot.

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3. The detective story, in which the plot is deliberately presented upsidedown. Consequences are first shown, and then worked backward to their causes, the steps being all suggested, yet made as unexpected as possible, that the reader may exercise his own wits and join the detective in an effort to solve the riddle.

4. The novel of the unknown, the story of strange suggestion, which reaches beyond man's knowledge of his cosmos, not to terrify and amaze, but to analyze and understand, to suggest possibilities and questions, to see human nature in new lights, as Hawthorne does in "Septimius Felton," or Mr. Wells in his "War with Mars."

### III THE NOVEL OF ORDINARY LIFE

This is the study of the Probable, the work that rejects the primitive appeal to wonder, to the "strange thing" of the Egyptian "chief-reciter." Fearing the false presentation of life in the over employment of "surprise," the author refuses to deal in coincidence or even in the unusual, and insists that fiction shall be less strange than truth. His work concerns itself less with action than with character and with the simpler emotions. Under this heading may be classed:

1. The novel of purpose, a name which I retain here only because of its established vogue, and by which I mean the sermon, the tractate, which has adopted something of the novel's form only to reach an audience. This form deliberately sets out to convince the reader of some doctrine, some one improvement which is to be accepted

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and established as part of our actual, ordinary lives. Such an argument can not be built on chance or on coincidence; for its aim is to make its goal seem as obvious and undeniable as possible. This goal must also be made to look as attractive as possible, so that it may persuade while it convinces. Rousseau's "Emile" may be quoted as a case in point, or Mrs. Ward's "Robert Elsmere," or Mrs. Sarah Grand's vehemently pointed works.

2. The photographic novel, a name which seems preferable to "realistic" because the latter term has been expanded by some writers to a much broader use. The term is here employed for the novel which adopts photography as its ideal, and insists on showing us things as they actually are, or at least as they appeared at the moment when the novelist was looking. The demand of such a work is for facts, not the understanding of fact. Its aim is to lay life—sometimes a very ugly side of life—before the reader like a panorama, leaving that panorama to make what impression it may, whether of contempt, of enjoyment, or of yearning toward reform. The Goncourt brothers, or Zola, offer here the typical examples.

3. The true novel of common life, which has no concentrated, narrow aim whatever, but seeks simply to depict our everyday selves in everyday attire. The art of such a book lies in its simplification; the value depends upon the insight. Our casual, rather tawdry dramas are here divested of the multifarious commonplace which hides them from our view, and shown as they really are. Jane Austen's works are the perfection of the form.



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### IV THE NOVEL OF THE INEVITABLE

This is the study that probes the underlying laws of existence, that seeks to know the spirit, and sometimes as if by sudden inspiration grasps its reward. Such a work concerns itself solely with internal plot, with the meaning of life, not with its surface expression. Here the reader faces the growth and deterioration of personality, the development of the human spirit through suffering or joy or toil. The author reaches toward those hidden, intangible dramas of the soul, wherein emotion, surging up beyond human control, ceases to be amenable to chance and to convention, asserts itself as the supreme power and beats with passionate defiance against the thrones of the unknown, unchanging Fates.

This challenge of the universe was in its earliest form represented by:

1. The novel of sentiment, which dealt wholly with the ideal. Such works were in effect a confused and doubtful protest against life as life persistently reveals itself in commonplace. Mackenzie's "Man of Feeling" made such protest. Goethe's "Werther" can not wholly escape being classified here. Next came

2. The true novel of character; that is, the one which studies the development of character under the stress of life's tragedies and comedies, which shows events not for themselves, but to mark their effect upon the human soul, as in "The Vicar of Wakefield" or Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister" or most of Thackeray's work.

3. The problem novel, a form easily confused with the novel of purpose, because both present some difficulty of

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life. But with the purpose novel this is some outward difficulty, some convention of society, which is attacked and theoretically overthrown. A puppet giant is built up on purpose to be knocked down. Naturally he is shown at his ugliest, and his fall is accompanied by enthusiastic applause. The problem novel attains no such self-congratulatory triumph. It faces some inherent difficulty that lies within, in human nature itself. The giant here is real, he will not down; and so perforce the novel runs away and leaves him threatening. In thus endeavoring to look man's mightiest tyrants in the face, the problem novel can not treat them with scorn, can not vilify nor insult them, because it knows not whether they be good or evil. Heaping curses on the Inevitable is like a child thrusting out its tongue, as easy and as idle. The effort of the problem novel is just to look, to understand. Tolstoi's work deals thoughtfully with this Inevitable. Gorki has essayed it.

4. Allied to the problem novel there is a higher form for which one can scarcely as yet attempt a name. It is that epic form wherein man rises superior to existence, wherein a human soul, divested of every last trapping and disguise, denuded of every adventitious aid, is seen to measure itself at fullest height against all the bitterness and fruitlessness in life. Overthrowing or overthrown, the lone spirit stands like Antæus, becoming ever mightier in its wrestle against Fate, until it has reached out beyond our ken, and the author, stooping to recall the human environment of the strife, must dismiss this as a little matter. I am not sure any novel quite reaches to this height; but the "Scarlet Letter" is of the type I mean.

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So despite all its complexity is Thackeray's "The New-comes," and despite all its prolixity Richardson's "Clarissa Harlowe."

This fourfold division seems thus to give a practical basis for the separation of novels. Of course the allied forms shade into one another. Some novels can not even be confined under one of the four main heads; but generally speaking these hybrid forms are ineffective. The character novel, for instance, has sometimes employed intrigue. "Tom Jones" stands as the great example, though critics who rank Fielding's character drawing above his plot, may ignore the intrigue and class this character masterpiece with Jane Austen's work, or even under our fourth head. I think, however, that the most ardent admirer of "Tom Jones" will admit that its divided aim is a misfortune, that the characters of both Blifil and Mrs. Blifil are injured for the plot. So is the heroine; so Allworthy, who becomes a blinded fool. Even Tom's consistency is strained a bit to enable him to repent at the right moment. I pause on this point, only to emphasize the value of a division which thus enforces a consistent attitude toward truth. If you are playing with coincidence, you can not analyze the soul; for that stands above coincidence.

So also the novel of adventure has sometimes sought supernatural terrors. But if the hero of adventure is to be a good, swashbuckling hero, he can not yield even to ghosts. He must defy them. And then where is the reader's fear? So, in the photographic novel, the writer can not venture too far into asseverations of emotion or

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analyses of character ; for there he must probe deeps eye can not see, he who depends solely on the eye.

It is not my purpose to assert that any one of the dozen forms I have differentiated is greater than another, but only that they are essentially different, and that each must be consistent with itself. All novelists may be seeking "the great god Verity," but they have widely differing ideas as to the appearance of their deity. If I may fall back upon my earlier figure of the fair, veiled lady Truth, her many knightly champions must remain each faithful to his own conception of his lady. The novelist, like any other cobbler, must "stick to his last." With whatever view of universal law he settles himself to write, in whatever attitude toward life, that view, that attitude, he must maintain.

Unity here reasserts itself under another guise. I would close as I began by insisting that in these two principles, in truth and unity, truth to life underlying superficial lack of fact, and unity of purpose underlying superficial variety of expression, in these two are found the cardinal principles of the novel.

THE END

## APPENDIX

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

The general reader may be assumed to be fairly acquainted with most of the books discussed in the preceding pages; and the critic familiar with the great masterworks may be content to ramble through this "book about books," recalling pleasant hours spent with the originals, and balancing his judgment step by step against the present writer's.

To the unprepared student, however, whether in the college or the library, any critical book is apt to prove a dangerous snare. He is over-ready to accept some one else's opinion about books, hoping thus to escape many a lengthy journey through the masterworks themselves. One can not too strongly urge that the value of a critical work is wholly lost to the student if he does not familiarize himself with the texts discussed.

How extensive the supplementary course of reading should be in the present case, must depend on circumstances. I have not as a rule found it excessive to ask students to read one novel a week throughout the collegiate year. But the amount of time which different people devote to the reading of a single novel varies to an extent almost incredible. I have known one student to plod steadily for a week through a brief tale which another finished in three hours. Yet both were interested, both earnest, and I am not at all sure which drew most benefit from the book, or which closed it with the better understanding of the whole.

I would suggest that, as these pages are gone through, the student should read at least the following works, each as it is mentioned in the text:

#### WITH PART ONE

*Egyptian Tales* by W. Flinders Petrie  
*Greek Romances* transl. by Rowland Smith (Bohn's Library)  
*The Lay of the Nibelungs* transl. by Alice Horton  
*Amadis of Gaul*, Southey's abridgment  
*Don Quixote* by Cervantes

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*History of the Novel previous to the Seventeenth Century* by  
F. M. Warren

*Oroonoko* by Mrs. Aphra Behn

*Gil Blas* by Le Sage

*Colonel Jacque* by Defoe

*Pamela* by Richardson

### WITH PART TWO

*The English Novel* by W. Raleigh

*Joseph Andrews* by Fielding

*Clarissa Harlowe* by Richardson

*Tom Jones* by Fielding

*Roderick Random* by Smollett

*Candide* by Voltaire

*Vicar of Wakefield* by Goldsmith

*Sorrows of Werther* by Goethe

*Evelina* by Frances Burney

*Mysteries of Udolpho* by Mrs. Radcliffe

*Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

*Quentin Durward* by Scott

*Hunchback of Notre Dame* by Victor Hugo

*Père Goriot* by Balzac

*Pickwick Papers* by Dickens

*Henry Esmond* by Thackeray

*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë

*Hypatia* by Charles Kingsley

*Scarlet Letter* by Hawthorne

*Silas Marner* by George Eliot

*Rise of Silas Lapham* by W. D. Howells

*The Master of Ballantrae* by R. L. Stevenson

This list could of course be greatly expanded to advantage, both in the way of stories and of critical works. A supplementary list of the former would be:

*Beowulf*, Arnold's edition

*Song of Roland*

*Morte Darthur* by Sir Thomas Malory

*Gesta Romanorum*, ed. by C. Swan (Bohn Library)

*Decameron* by Boccaccio

*Early Prose Romances*, ed. by H. Morley (Carisbrooke Library)

*Rosalynde* by Thomas Lodge

*Arcadia* by Sir Philip Sidney

*Diana* by George de Montemayor (transl. by T. Wilson, 1596)

*Lazarillo de Tormes*

*Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan

*The New Heloise* by J. J. Rousseau

*Castle of Otranto* by Walpole

*Caleb Williams* by W. Godwin

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- Castle Rackrent* by Maria Edgeworth  
*Frankenstein* by Mrs. Shelley  
*Mysteries of Paris* by Eugene Sue  
*Three Musketeers* by Dumas  
*Deerslayer* by Cooper  
*Madame Bovary* by Flaubert  
*Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo  
*Vanity Fair* by Thackeray  
*Barchester Towers* by Trollope  
*Ordeal of Richard Feverel* by Meredith  
*Far from the Madding Crowd* by Thomas Hardy  
*Anna Karenina* by Tolstoi  
*The Downfall* by Zola

The student will probably find the following to be the most useful and easily accessible critical works:

- \* Sir Walter Besant, *The Art of Fiction* (London, 1884)  
 W. L. Cross, *The Development of the English Novel* (1899)  
 W. J. Dawson, *Makers of English Fiction* (1905)  
 John Dunlop, *History of Prose Fiction* (revised ed. by H. Wilson, 1896)  
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 ✓ Brander Matthews, *The Historical Novel* (1901)  
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